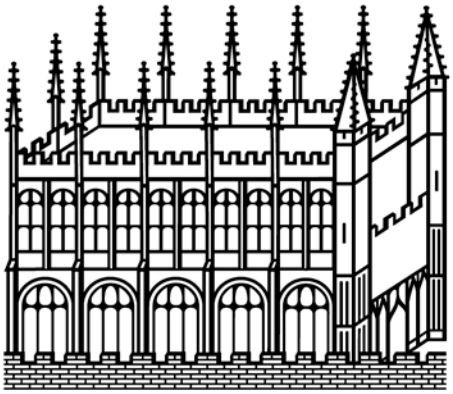

The Two Countesses

MARIE EBNER VON ESCHENBACH

THE TWO COUNTESSES

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27. THE TWO COUNTESSES.

MARIE EBNER VON ESCHENBACH

THE TWO COUNTESSES

TRANSLATED BY

MRS. WAUGH

LONDON
T. FISHER UNWIN
PATERNOSTER SQUARE

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The Baroness von Ebner Eschenbach is looked upon in Austrian literary circles much as Mrs. Craik is over here. Her style is pure and graceful, distinguished by deep thought and a tender sympathy with human suffering, yet very vivacious. A realist, she is a clear and keen observer, whose characters, delineated simply and forcibly, impress themselves upon all who read her. A great reader, and much prized in society, Madame Ebner von Eschenbach devotes a good deal of her time to works of charity, and finds her only leisure for writing in the retirement of her castle in Zdislavic.

Translator's Note.

COUNTESS MUSCHI.

COUNTESS MUSCHI.

SEBENBERG CASTLE,
November, 1882.

THE shooting season is over; all our guests have left the Castle; we are as dull as ditch-water, and I, at length, have time to write to you, dear Nesti.

Poor Fred, too, has gone. He was awfully kind and amusing, but woefully unhappy. I am truly sorry for him, poor fellow, but I cannot help it. His estate up in the mountains brings in next to nothing; and we could

not live upon air, first-rate as it seems to be up there.

But I have something much more interesting to tell you about, and will plunge you at once in *milias res*—Latin, my love; comes from *milieu*. Where did I pick that up? Heaven only knows. I am awfully quick at learning, as my poor old governess Nagel, whom I have brought up, solemnly avers to this day.

So, now, prick up your ears!

Yesterday, while engaged in collecting postage stamps—you must know that one million stamps procures one a little Chinese baby; no humbug! You may trust my word for it, and send me a few thousands if you happen to have them by you—I suddenly came upon one from Würtemberg.

"Who is our correspondent in Würtemberg, mamma?"

"That is a secret," answers mamma, and I see that she is burning to tell me. A few minutes later I know all about it. As a young man, papa had served in the same regiment with a Count Aich-Kronburg. Both fell in love with the same girl, a rich heiress; the Swabian was the successful lover, papa the first to congratulate him. So they remained friends. Now their son and heir, the young Count, is on his travels, and is to stop at Sebenberg to do the agreeable to papa and mamma and—whom else? Mamma made me guess, and then embraced me, as our mothers have a way of doing when they hope soon to be rid of us.

So my probable lord and master is a Swabian! If only I knew what he was like, and that he has not great clod-hopping feet

on which to stump off to drink beer with his steward and people through the long hours of the afternoon!

But, oh, my dear girl, after supper it was so deadly dull that I began to think if he had feet like an elephant I would accept him! An evening in which we are condemned to our own society, as sometimes happens now at Sebenberg, is quite too ghastly. Papa persuades himself that he is reading the *Sporting Times*, and goes fast asleep over it. Mamma knits white wraps, the patterns of which are decided by the form of her cigar ash as it falls. My uncle plays tactics with the singing-mistress, and Aunt Julia devotes herself to word-making with Fräulein Nagel.

"The fifty-seventh word, Fräulein?"

"A village in Servia."

"In Servia?"

"Yes. It begins with a K and ends with an E."

"Kindly pass me Meyer."

"I have looked there, and cannot find it."

"Then Ritter."

And they fall to studying Ritter. There you have table No. 1.

At table No. 2, at the far end of the drawing-room, the little ones are playing games with the nursery governess, and I sit on the *causeuse* in solitary state betwixt youth and age, like Dido upon Naxos.

Dear me! another classical allusion. You really must overlook it; I am so bored I am growing quite stupid. My bulldog gives a stretch and yawns at me.

"*Venez*," I say to her, "let us

go out on to the balcony. Perhaps a bat may fly by for our amusement."

As I gracefully recline upon the parapet I hear a manly tread behind me. It is papa. He, too, leans upon the balcony, and at first says nothing. Then suddenly—

"Pussy!"

"What, papa?"

"What are you doing?"

"Questioning the bats, papa."

He laughs.

"I'll tell you something, but, mind, no chattering."

"Oh, no, papa."

"You won't say a word?"

"No, papa."

He looks straight into my eyes. "Not even to mamma?" And then he told me all about the young Count's coming visit.

I merely asked did the Kronburgs keep a racing stud? Papa

did not know—thought most probably not. Alas!

Your

MUSCHI.

SEBENBERG CASTLE,

November 10, 1882.

DEAR NESTI,—Do not be so impatient. I cannot sit all day long at my writing-table keeping you informed as to our doings. We are not nearly as far advanced as you imagine; there is no talk of "congratulations" at present, and I beg above all things that you will not indulge in sentimentalities. The name of the *fiancé*—how ridiculous you are, child!—is Carl, like our groom of the chambers, who, ever since the Count's arrival, has been called by his surname. He is not as tall as papa, though a very good height, and would have quite presentable feet if

only he had a better bootmaker. But he wears square-toed boots that are simply hideous.

He arrived in a kind of cloth tunic, which the poor fellow had apparently had made expressly for travelling. I must find out who is his tailor, that I may duly warn all my friends against him. It is unfortunate, too, that he wears gloves like any commercial traveller, or one of the *jeunesse dorée* of a German novel.

Understand from this, Nesti, that I have not, by any means, made up my mind yet.

The amusing part of it is the intense amiability displayed by papa and mamma towards him. It is irresistibly funny. Papa even kept quite wide awake last evening; and he, who usually takes no interest in talking to people about anything but their horses or dogs, began inquiring

all about the laws of forestry in Swabia; whether land was farmed out there; if owners lived much upon their estates; what kind of hunting there was, et-z-r-a (which stands for "and so on." I am afraid it is not the right way to write it, but, to tell truth, I never could do it properly).

The Count answered very nicely, only he is rather shy, and that gives him a somewhat pedantic manner. About nine o'clock it began to get decidedly tame, when, to my surprise and delight, Fred unexpectedly appeared with his brother and the two Hockhaus. They were on their way to the military steeplechase at Raigern, and came to beg quarters for the night. I at once got up a circus entertainment, sent for a four-in-hand driving whip, and trotted Fred out first as the thoroughbred

mare Arabi. It sent us into fits to see how he sprang over chairs, and backed, and reared, and finally picked up my handkerchief from the floor with his teeth. Then we made Nagel sit down to the piano and play a set of quadrilles for the four to dance. They did it spendidly; they are such dear boys. The youngest Hockhaus is so good-natured, and he really has a face like a horse. At last Fred, jumping upon his brother's back, introduced himself as Mademoiselle Pimpernelle upon her splendidly trained horse Rob Roy. If only you could have seen him! — the coquettish glances he gave, his mincing airs, and the farewell kisses of the hand he sent back in all directions as he was gaily trotted off. I never saw anything so funny. We were immensely

amused, papa and mamma as much as any of us. But the Count looked on stiff as buckram, until I thought to myself, "My good sir, if you happened to be stolen, I'd not be the one to send the crier after you." The best thing of all in our circus was when the noble steed, having had more than enough of Mademoiselle Pimpernelle's riding-whip, suddenly took to rearing and plunging, and rolled over with his fair rider.

We were so overheated from laughing that, to cool down, I proposed a *jeu d'esprit* of my own invention. The whole company sat round a table, a saucer of pounded sugar was brought in, and each one in turn had to dip his nose in it. Then, when all were ready, I gave the word—one, two, three—and every one had to try to lick away the sugar

from the tip of his nose. . . . The one who did it first was the winner. . . . Oh, to see the grimaces and contortions we made, and how indignant my dear old Nagel was, and yet had to join in it!—description fails me.

Papa was the first winner, then Kuni Hockhaus, then I—and Fred only, with his dear little *retroussé* nose, could not accomplish it; he was thoroughly beaten, poor fellow! He is such a dear old boy.

Your

MUSCHI.

SEBENBERG CASTLE,

November 19, 1882.

With all due respect be it said, my love, you are as pedantic as any old blue-stocking. Only go on in like manner and

you will soon be eligible for a writer of penny dreadfuls.

I have given you, as yet, no description of his personal appearance? All right; I will ask him for his passport; therein you will read: Blue eyes, fair hair, reddish moustache, face clean shaven, regular features — and you will be just as wise as you were before. Clumsy? No, that he is decidedly not. His ears are the best point about him, small, well shaped, and close set. And disposition? That you needs must know too. Well, good, a trifle quiet, with a touch of the grandfatherly in it. But I will modernise him, poor fellow.

I told him the other day that the men about us were in the habit of getting their hosiery and a couple of suits, at least, from England every year; and

that an ill-dressed man was an anomaly in society.

"Why?" he asked. "Please explain."

His simplicity annoyed me, and I answered, "The thing is clear enough, and needs no explanation."

"Good heavens!" said he, "if it be our clothes alone which fit us for society, how highly we should esteem those who make them. A man ought never to be seen but arm-in-arm with his tailor."

Have you ever heard anything so idiotic? Tell me honestly.

Yesterday we were out with the harriers. I, well in front on my good Harras, not caring so much for the hunt, but enjoying the exhilaration of meeting the keen wind, when, at a bit of a ditch my fool of a horse, hang it! gathers himself for a spring,

as if he were going at a hurdle, and I—Nesti—I flew over his head.

There lay I, and Harras standing snorting angrily, and looking as if he had never set eyes on me before. He seemed not to know me, would not believe I was his mistress, was ready to tear off away from me, and let me limp home on foot. . . .

Nesti, my heart beat wildly. . . . Rising very slowly, so as not to frighten him, I kept saying, "Harasserl, quiet, my beauty, it was only a joke!" And while he snorted at me I caught hold of his bridle, and, looking round, saw no one near. Oh, what joy thought I; led Harras to the bank of the ditch, and was just about to spring into the saddle, when he grows wild again, and gets quite un-

manageable — and why? He hears a horse galloping, and true enough, that stupid Count must needs come dashing up.

"What has happened, Countess?" he asks.

"Nothing," I answer, and turn away that he may not see my hot cheeks. "I was only doing something to my saddle."

"You are all right?"

"All right."

He springs off his horse, and without a word holds out his hand. I place my foot on it, and suffer myself to be lifted on to the saddle, and to have the folds of my habit straightened, without the slightest idea of whether he has an inkling of what has happened. Then, drawing out his handkerchief, he begins to wipe me down, and now for the first time I perceive that I am covered with

mud from head to foot. You may imagine my feelings. Well! this done, the Count tucks his handkerchief into his breast-pocket and mounts again, and, giving Harras a taste of my whip, I jump him five times backwards and forwards over the ditch; not where it was dry and narrow, but further on, where it broadens and is full of water. Then we rode quietly along to meet papa. It was a long time before I could persuade myself to speak: yet it had to be, if I were not to feel uncomfortable all the rest of the day. So at last I said—

"Please do not tell a soul of my fall."

Smiling, he answered, "I give you my word that I will not betray you."

So for a moment we were good friends, and I absolutely began

to think whether I would not have him after all. But it did not last long, and now I think him simply detestable. . . . My dear child, he is nothing but a pedantic old German schoolmaster. Just listen. On our way to the stables I suddenly heard a rustling and crackling, and among the bushes espied a pair of little bare feet.

"A wood-stealer!" cried I. "Hullo, I must see to that. I'll catch the young rascal!"

And with a look at the Count to keep still, I jumped off my horse and ran to the opening made by the little scamp. True enough, in a very short time out crawls my man, dragging a whole bundle of faggots after him. . . . He looks up, sees me, screeches like a hare, and scampers off as fast as his legs will carry him towards the village.

I fly after him; of course soon catch him up; stoop, pull off his cap, and tell him if he wants it again he must come to the Castle and fetch it. Whereupon he whimpers the usual tale; begs, entreats, kneels to me, until I have enough of it, and throw him back his cap. . . . And then what do you think he did? With a grimace at me, he had the impudence to pick up the bundle of faggots and make off. I was on the point of going after him, to give it him hot and strong, when up rides the Count with a face as long as my arm, and has the impertinence to say to me—

"You make an excellent ranger!"

"Is it not customary with you to protect your woods against wood-stealers?" I ask.

"Oh, undoubtedly," he makes

reply, "but we prefer to leave that somewhat subordinate occupation to our foresters."

When I think it over calmly the answer in itself does not appear so exasperating; but the way he looked at me as he said it making me feel so uncommonly small. . . .

Your

MUSCHI.

SEBENBERG CASTLE,

November 28, 1882.

We are the best of friends again. Our reconciliation was effected by means of Rattler and the little Chinese boy. You must know, Nesti, that ever since the Count's arrival papa has been more than odd. He who on my sixth birthday gave me my first pony, and allowed me to have as many dogs as I chose, is now for ever frowning

and saying, "Can't you find anything better to talk about than horses?" or "Where on earth can the child have got this mania for dogs?" while mamma, as she lights a fresh cigar, remarks, "Muschi must always go to extremes." That day it was her ninth since lunch. Sometimes I amuse myself by counting how many she gets through in a day. The end of it was that when papa heard that my English terrier had had pups, he declared that he would throw every man Jack of them out of the window if he caught any of them about the Castle. So nothing remained for me but to ensconce the whole family party in the library. Not a soul goes in there, and the pups are under my eye.

They are such hungry little fellows, and are as comfortable

as possible in their basket under the table by the fire, cosily hidden by the table-cover, that hangs down to the ground. Three times a day I go to see the mother and take her some milk. To-day there was great joy: two of the pups had opened their eyes. I congratulated their mamma, and said, "Don't you think you might move about a little now, you lazy thing! Get up, get up!" But she, giving me a limp paw, sets up barking, . . . and I, in an agony of fear, take hold of her nose and hold it tightly, with a threatening "Quiet, Rattler, or you will lose your pups!" At the same moment I hear a laughing "Good morning" behind me. . . . You know the big armchair that stands in the window recess, its back turned to the fireplace? With one knee upon

it, his arms resting upon the back, as if he were in an opera-box, is the Count. "Bother take you, Mr. Detective!" I think to myself; and the following conversation ensues:—

I. When did you come in?

He. Oh, I was here long before you came.

I. Indeed! And pray what were you doing?

He. Reading.

I. Reading? You need not think I am such a little greenhorn as to believe that.

He. Your doubts surprise me! Why should I not have been reading?

I. On such a day, when you might have been following the hounds? You may tell that to the marines.

He (springing from his post of vantage, and coming towards me with a forbidding expression on

his face). Your opinion of the pleasure to be derived from books seems to be but small?

I. Were it a question of life or death with you, my opinion would remain the same.

He (with expression still more forbidding). I am much obliged! I value my life too highly to stake it in such a cause.

I. I assure you, on my honour, you would not be risking much.

He (like an old professor at an exam.). You apparently occupy yourself but little with reading?

I. Just enough to do penance for my sins, and to keep up my English.

He (with a kind of fatherly solicitude which strikes me as intensely comical, and with an air of severity which exasperates me). And, may I ask, do you think it necessary to keep up

your French in the same manner?

I. In the same manner.

(Oh, my dear, I grew crimson; for the thought of that wretched book flashed across my mind that Fred got for me last winter, and of which I would not tell you one word, despite all your entreaties.)

He. You are acquainted, then, with the modern French ideas of society?

I (impatiently). I might say "No," and you would believe me; but I hate a lie, and so, like an honourable fellow, I prefer to say "Yes."

He (looks at me a long while —not angrily this time, but quite sorrowfully—and murmurs, "What a pity! . . . but 'honourable fellow' is delightful!"). Tell me, old man—I beg pardon, honoured Countess—do you ever

read a German book? We have some well worth reading.

I. Oh, Goethe and Schiller! Yes, I know——

Nesti, a weary prospect opened out to me. In imagination I saw ourselves sitting like the young couple on the title-page of a German magazine—he reading aloud, of course out of Schiller; I, in "attitude of rapt attention," nestling up to him; our baby, in the arms of my one maid and general factotum, gravely turning over the leaves of a family Goethe. . . .

"If that is his picture of our domestic life," thought I, "the sooner I undeceive him the better." And as he hurriedly asked, "You know Goethe and Schiller?" I answered resolutely, "Pooh! do not expect me to study the classics. Goethe, I have always been told, is im-

moral; and Schiller is quite too long-winded for me."

So that was settled once for all. We then talked about other things, principally about Rattler, whom he said was a jolly little creature, swearing not to betray me. And he was as nice as could be when I asked him to collect postage stamps for me. It certainly took him some time before he understood what I wanted them for, and that they have to be sent out to China, as soon as one has a million, to buy a little Chinese boy. "And what will you do with him when you have got him?" he asked. And I told him that he was to be christened and trained for me as my little page, to stand behind my chair and wait upon me at table, in a yellow dress with a long pigtail. The Count laughed heartily (he is delightful when

he laughs), and with a hearty shake of the hand, said, "All right, I will help you. At any rate, this is one ideal object." *Addio.*

Your

MUSCHI.

SEBENBERG CASTLE,

December 6, 1883.

You may think yourself highly honoured at my sitting down to write to you at this hour: it is 2 a.m., and I am dead tired.

My dear Nesti, we are in a whirl. Fred and his friends are back from Raigern, and have brought some officers with them. Old Countess Aarheim and her four daughters are staying here; the lake is hard frozen and the snow a foot deep.

Our mornings are spent in visiting the stables and riding-school; after luncheon we skate or go sleighing; in the evening

we play games, or dance, or just simply lounge about. Cloclo, to my infinite amusement, has set up a furious flirtation with the Count; Mitzi is still pining with love for Fred; and as for Kitzi and Pips, they remain faithful to each other, and will carry the day yet. What can parents do when their children won't give in? It would be too absurd for a captain to marry on his pay. He certainly would not be my taste, but the two geese reply to every common-sense remonstrance that they love each other. As if they could have any reason more senseless for making each other miserable.

The Count has quite joined the masculine community, and is first and foremost among them; he has given up paying compliments, and, do you know, my dear, I have made up my mind to accept him.

Fred, who of course scented at once the meaning of the Count's visit, is behaving so sensibly that one cannot praise him enough; he really is a dear old fellow. Do you remember at the last carnival his wearing my colours, and yet, even then, he never breathed a word to trouble me, nor has he now.

This morning I was trying the paces of a foal, and Fred, whip in hand, came up.

"How do you like the Count?" said he. "I think him a capital fellow, and he has £30,000 a-year."

"And not a single racer," said I; upon which, with a sly look, he replied—

"That will soon be altered. If you should want a first-rate master of the hounds, think of a friend at Rahn up in the mountains——"

I should think I would! He shall be one of the first I invite in my new home to make people sociable together.

Good-night, Nesterl. I declare I am half asleep . . . a moment ago I was wide awake, but the thought of the admirable Clara Aarheim has set me yawning. . . . "My domesticated daughter," as the old Countess calls her, because she has evidently given up all hope of establishing her—"my domesticated daughter" is more insipid than ever; she would do very well for a major's wife—say a major in the infantry who lives upon his pay. Now my young lady has renounced the world she finds no pleasure in society—in other words, no partners. No one can endure her with her mincing ways and everlasting blushes. She bores even the Count, and

he is never as lively with her as with us. . . Only fancy, he considers her good looking! A good-looking stick. That kind of beauty is not to my taste; it reminds me of those statues we pass by in museums, with downcast glance, when we walk along so discreetly with our mammas —poor mammas! if they only knew that we are not as demure as we look!

Only fancy, the Count can be satirical. He actually persuaded Clara to mount before us all, and then praised her riding to the skies. We were dying with laughter, and she looked so confused. . . . and I, catching up a book, rushed forward, saying gravely—

"Allow me to celebrate the episode in verse," and sang—

" Slow and sure, slow and sure,
To guard our bones is the best cure!"

Good-night, I am dead asleep; I must say my prayers in the morning. And only think, the Count said to me—

"You have such a charming voice, what a pity you have never taken singing lessons."

Here I went to sleep last night, my pen fell on the paper, and you will receive a letter adorned with blots. I have one thing more to tell you about the worthy Clara. You must know that she raves about the Count, and took it upon herself to read me a lecture yesterday.

"With such a man"—oh! the emphasis on "such a man," and her eyes lit up like a couple of Bengal lights—"with such a man you should conduct yourself very differently, dearest Muschi. He is not accustomed to the kind of conversation you indulge in with the

fast young men you have about you. It is plain that he likes you; how could it be otherwise? but it is very evident that your talk and manners often horrify him." . . . And then she must needs launch out into a tirade against horsiness and stable talk, frivolity and lack of reading and thinking, and goodness only knows what. Heaven knows, I detest everything fast, but her way of depreciating the things that I most like and value exhausted my—never too great—stock of patience. I daresay I answered her very rudely, and I certainly told her that her room was as good as her company. And so my lady took herself off, looking uncommonly like a bedraggled poodle. And in my first fury I sat down then and there and made a sketch of her presiding over the school of needlework

she had started at home, a book under each arm, one hand wielding a birch rod, the other displaying a darned stocking, upon the tip of her nose, flattened for the purpose, pirouettes a tiny weeny scholar. My caricature made the round of the drawing-room, and everybody had a secret giggle over it. Nagel, of course, deplored my fresh piece of mischief, and had nearly let the cat out of the bag. Clara was more amused by it than any one, which was far from my intention, and the Count was amazed at my talent for drawing, and thought it a thousand pities that I had not had drawing lessons. The remainder of the evening he devoted to Clara, presumably talking to her about her school of needlework. Poor man!

Yours,

MUSCHI.

I open this to tell you that the Count has begged me to grant him an interview. Things are becoming serious. My parents are beaming. I will telegraph to you when our engagement is to be made known.

SEBENBERG CASTLE,
December 28, 1883.

Yes, dearest, we shall soon be coming to Vienna, and I shall be jolly glad to see your sweet self again, and glad of Carnival. What a nuisance that it is cut so short now; there is no possibility of crowding in enough dances; and I feel inclined to rush in madly for gaiety. Unluckily Fred will be away; he is spending the winter in Old England, as he wrote papa a few days ago, with apologies to the ladies for not having come over to say good-bye before starting. Papa is angry

because Fred rather did him over some horses—as if that—— Your letter has just come—the third in which you bombard me with questions. Don't you see that I have been taking a rise out of you? How do you suppose that I should consent to be immured in Swabia, where the men go in for domestic life as a profession, and the women knit socks from conviction?

We certainly did have a conversation, Count Carl and I, but of a very different nature from what you have been imagining.

He began by saying that his visit to us had been a memorable one, in that it had given him quite new impressions—had opened out a new world to him.

"If it was new to you, you have adapted yourself very readily to it," I made reply.

"What wonder, with such a

guide as you, Countess—such a model in all knightly arts and usages."

"Is that intended to be ironical?"

"By no means. I return to my Penates richer than I came."

"To where?"

"To my household gods."

"Aha!"

Here the interview came to a slight hitch, but I set it going again by asking what was the gain he had made by coming among us.

"Of a friend!" he exclaimed; "a young, charming, reliable friend, named Countess Muschi."

"Pardi!" I exclaimed.

And he, losing no time, seized my hand, colouring fiery red, and his voice shook. "A friend upon whose help and support I count in the most important moment of my life."

"What moment do you mean?"

"That which must decide the weal or woe of all my after life —that in which you will win my eternal gratitude—by asking——" Here his shaky voice toppled over entirely.

"Whom am I to ask—myself?" I blurted out; but, luckily for me, in his agitation he was unconscious how I had given myself away, and went on:

"Countess Clara Aarheim."

Here I must have looked uncommonly sold, for he exclaimed, hurriedly, "You think there is no chance for me. Is it too late —is Countess Clara no longer free?"

Nesti, human nature would not stand it; and I broke out with "What a sell!" Upon which the poor Count was thrown into fresh alarm, and conjured me to be frank with him, and only tell

him if he must renounce the idea. Of course, it would have been a miracle if such a treasure as Clara had not already found a suitor, and he had been a fool to hope for such a miracle.

"Stuff and rubbish," thinks I to myself; then aloud, "Not such a fool as you think! I know Clara's affairs tolerably well. So far she has had no admirers."

"Is it so—is it so?" and seizing my hand he kissed it passionately. "And she? Has she not seemed to care for any one?"

"Not a bit of it. A girl is hardly likely to be so unpractical as to care for a man if he does not care for her. That is hardly our way."

He heaved a deep sigh.

"You have no idea what a girl in your sphere can do who has the courage not to 'be led by fashion.'"

"Pray do not expect such *courage* from me. To my mind it is as little like the real thing as is forced laughter to real honest mirth."

"And yet I do not know. There may be a higher standpoint than that of society."

"That is the one consolation of those who are excluded from it."

"Then at least grant it to such poor devils, who would otherwise be left despairing," he said, with a good-humoured laugh; and, going back to his subject, he overwhelmed me with entreaties to find out from Clara, without her knowing it, if he were in any way obnoxious to her.

To this I answered that I could save myself that trouble; that he was anything but obnoxious to her.

"And you think, then, that I may hope in time——?"

"In time? This very day, if you only choose to ask."

"Countess!"

"Why are you so surprised? Clara would never dream for a moment of refusing you. When has she ever had a chance of making such a match before?"

"Ah! — of making such a match," he repeated, crestfallen. "If it were only— You could not have given me greater discouragement, Countess, than in that one word."

And so, in his discouragement, he poured out to poor me an harangue about love, intellect, mutual understanding, winding up with the trite remark that nothing in married life is so important as are these things. Any poor devil who had not known a day's happiness in his

life, or what money can bring, could not have spoken more eloquently.

Awfully odd! it did not seem all nonsense to me—at least not the whole time. There were actually moments in which the thought came over me, perhaps, after all, he is not so utterly wrong; perhaps there really is something in sympathy of taste, as well as in suitability of position. (Certainly position alone does not promote happiness!) And then I thought to myself, "You are a good man and clever, I am not a bad girl or a stupid one—why should not we have suited each other? Perhaps I was a goose for my pains to have thrown you in Clara's way! But that little *malaise* soon passed over, and I began to picture her felicity, and the joke it would be to ask her if she would accept the Count.

Then, too, I remembered the many tricks I had played her; and how ill I had requited her friendship for me; and so, extending my hand in right good fellowship, I exclaimed:

"All right! Shake hands upon it. I will obtain permission for you to plead your cause. Take it all in all, Clara is well suited to you. She has always said that in marriage the bridegroom was more to be considered than his rent-roll."

My red sportswoman's hands have often been kissed, but never so fervently as by the Count at that juncture.

Suffice it to say, Nesti, all went off splendidly. Clara's perplexity was tremendous: how at first she said No, in her humility and discretion; how the Count then went at it with a will, swearing a man could only marry

one woman—and what was to be done if that woman would not have him ?

The bliss of Casa Aarheim can be more easily imagined than described. My people seemed less overjoyed. Mamma puffed away at her nineteenth cigar that day. Papa pinched my cheek, and said :

" I say, pussy."

" What, papa ? "

" You are a goose."

" Family secret, papa. If you betray it, it's at your own cost."

Three days later, the Count went home to make all necessary preparations for the reception of his young wife, to whom he is to be married during Carnival. His departure was quickly followed by that of the Aarheims.

The lovers' parting was, heaven be praised, accomplished without a scene. He held her hand for

a long pressure in his, looking at her as if to say, "Trust me." She, in the same language, made answer, "Unreservedly."

It was a parting thoroughly *comme il faut*, and I thought to myself——but why always confess to you all that I think?

Farewell, dear girl, and observe that it is not always as pleasant as it looks to be a sporting countess, pure and simple.

Yours,

MUSCHI.

COUNTESS PAULA.

COUNTESS PAULA.

WE had quite a crowded reception last night after the theatre. He was there — more reserved and silent than ever. He is going away—about to be transferred to some other Legation—probably to Serajewo.

My friends say it is the very place for him; they are merciless to any man who happens to be deficient in "style," absolutely merciless.

Countess Albertine was for some time in conversation with the Secretary of the French Le-

gation, by whom he was standing. I heard the Secretary remark that our German literature, otherwise so rich, was curiously deficient in Memoirs. The Countess, evidently not greatly impressed by this fact, murmured "Ah," and smiled as sweetly as if the greatest homage had been offered at her shrine. But he whom I like so well and esteem so highly, he, who is so gifted and patriotic, replied:

"Yes; unfortunately it is too true."

Oh, thought I, then the Frenchman is right; and I formed a resolution: If I do not marry—and I do not mean to marry ever—there shall I be my whole life without a single occupation. Were it not a worthy aim to devote my poor abilities to help supply so deplorable a deficiency? At least I will try. I enter, then,

upon this work with a due feeling of its solemn import. May Heaven prosper it!

My Memoirs.

The 15th of May, 1865, witnessed my entry into this world, to the anything but satisfaction of my parents. My sister was already married; my brother preparing for his final examination. During the first year of my existence my father never deigned to look at me. But I, nothing daunted, grew big and plump. Big, or rather tall, I am still; but plump, Heaven be praised, I am not. And as for my dear old father, if at first he did not love me, there is no trace of any such want now. He would do anything for me, and I have quite given up asking his permission to anything beforehand;

his one and only answer being always, "Do whatever you like!"

My childhood was passed almost entirely alone: first with my nurse as sole companion; afterwards with my governess, a perfect angel, knowing no more of the things of earth than angels do. For instance—of botany she simply knew nothing. If I asked her what was larkspur in French, she would answer, "*C'est le coucou bleu;*" a buttercup was "*le coucou jaune;*" eyebright, "*le coucou blanc.*" All flowers, that is all wild and field flowers, to her were various coloured *coucous*. But I must do her the justice to say that she was fully authorised not to go too thoroughly into my education, my dear good father having engaged her on the express stipulation that what he required for his daughter was a good "superficial" education.

And that was what I certainly obtained. Thus for a long time I thought I knew the history of the world from beginning to end; when suddenly I found that Madame Duphot, at mamma's request, had quietly suppressed the whole of one century—that of the Reformation. They desired that I should know nothing of Luther. But I discovered him—in the eleventh volume of Schlosser's "History of the World," accidentally forgotten and left behind, when it had been decided to turn out my brother's old books and pack them off to a secondhand dealer.

Heaven forgive me if I am a bad Catholic, but, honestly, Dr. Luther does not seem to me such a terrible creature that one dare not even know of his existence. Of course I did not venture to express so heterodox

an opinion to my devout Duphot; it would have destroyed her peace of mind for ever, and she would henceforth have been spending all her poor little savings on the reading of Masses for the restoration of my endangered faith. But I did tell the chaplain when next I went to confession. He merely imposed an extra penitential prayer — nothing more; nor did he in any way alter his customary admonition, nor the sentence with which it always closed—"And then say, 'Dear God, I thank Thee for all the mercies which Thou dost vouchsafe to me, and to my noble family.'"

I always used to think it strangely worded, and not exactly in accordance with the manner in which we should address the Divine Being, who takes no account of "noble"

families, we being all equal in His sight.

And this was not the only thing in which the reverend chaplain gave me ground for astonishment. Upon learned subjects he held views shared by no one save, perhaps, Madame Duphot and myself—and myself only up to a certain period. For example: he used to give me my geography lessons, we beginning with physiography as being the most difficult, and, once mastered, the rest being bound to follow as a matter of course. Among other things the reverend chaplain informed us: "At the North Pole it is cold, and at the South Pole" (Siedpol, he called it) "hot, I suppose."

As he said it the thing seemed clear, but afterwards I had my doubts, for, on reference to my dictionary, I found that *süd*

(south) and *sied* (scorching, boiling) had nothing whatever to do with each other.

But now enough of my studies, and to turn to my home life.

It was as happy as it could be. At the first sign of spring, I and my Duphot used to repair to Trostburg, our country seat, whither my parents followed for a stay of some weeks during the hunting season.

As with the dawn, long before sunrise, the sky is light, so, long before my dear ones arrived, my heart would be full of joyful expectation. True, their coming never realised things exactly as I had pictured them. The many guests arriving simultaneously with them claimed their constant attention, and, with the departure of the guests, they too went off to pastures new. We would go down to the carriage

to see them off, Duphot and I. Papa would kiss me fondly, mamma allow me to carry out her tiny lap-dog to her, from which she was never parted for a day. On pretext of placing it on her lap, I used to get into the carriage, put my arms round her neck, and kiss her as much as ever I wanted. It may be imagined if my kisses were few! Then they would drive away, mamma waving her dear hand to me ever so far along the road. When I could see them no longer from the court-yard, I would run to the turret-room and watch at the window until the carriage appeared, like a tiny speck, in the cutting through which they had to drive to reach the railway station. Half an hour later a dense white cloud would pass along the horizon, slowly to dissolve

in fleecy streaks; and then I knew: They are gone! That that cloud fading away in the sky had been emitted by the fiery engine which was bearing away from me those I loved best on earth.

After such partings I invariably cried, as I imagined, until far into the night — in reality until about ten o'clock; and the following morning I had already begun to look forward to our next meeting in Vienna.

There I was much better off. Papa would often come to visit me in the schoolroom, and mamma would send for me to the drawing-room to see those friends who asked for me. Almost daily we would meet in the Prater, and that was the acme of delight to me. Mamma was always so pleased to see me—

especially if I were prettily dressed. I got to know that she liked me best in my grey velvet pelisse trimmed with fur; and whenever my good Duphot took it into her head to have me dressed in anything else, I was like a little fury.

One day in spring—I shall never forget it; it happened to be my birthday, and I was ten years old—a very warm day, I had insisted on being dressed in my fur pelisse, much against Madame Duphot's better judgment. I was so hot in it I thought I should melt, what with delight and the temperature!

I was playing in one of the copses with some of my little friends near the walk, looking out the while for mamma, and thinking only of her. . . . At length I saw her coming down the avenue with a party of ladies

and gentlemen, and, pointing her out to my little friends, said, proudly:

"There; that is my mamma —the tallest, most beautiful of all mammas!"

The children looked up eagerly, and one little precocious creature, with whom I often used to fight, exclaimed:

"Yes, she might be if she were not so old. My mamma says that yours is old, and already has a lot of wrinkles round her eyes."

To hear this speech, fling myself upon her, and give her a slap, was with me the work of a second. Of course she struck back, and it became a free fight. Our governesses in vain tried to part us; all they got for their pains was a stray blow from one or the other, intended for the adversary. Suddenly I heard

mamma's voice calling me, and, forgetful of rage, scrimmage, and the enemy, I rushed off into the walk, with arms outstretched, towards her.

Repelling me with a look which rooted me to the spot, she exclaimed:

"*Comme vous voilà faite!*"

And for the first time in my life I saw mamma angry. Turning to Madame Duphot, who was curtseying to the ground, she haughtily inquired why I was not wearing my spring costume; and as she passed on we caught the words, "Really, these governesses are insupportable." And I—I could have wept for pity over my poor Duphot, and for shame over myself—wept, but sparks of fire, like Shakespeare's Queen, of whom, by the bye, I knew nothing in those days.

For three whole days we did not dare present ourselves in the Prater.

So I grew up.

Year by year my parents prolonged their stay at Trostburg, until they have got to spend the whole of the summer there. My dear mother's life is now passed in good works. She treats the sick folk of the village homœopathically, and has already effected some marvellous cures among them. She has founded a crèche, and a house of correction, where the lazy are to be made to work, and the ne'er-do-wells to be kept under stern discipline. Nothing could be more practical; the pity is that one cannot force the people to go into it; and, left to their own choice, they prefer to stay away.

My Duphot is in her element. She accompanies mamma twice

daily to church, reads religious books aloud to her, and prepares homœopathic dilutions.

Meanwhile I am papa's companion—and he is such a dear! We take long rides together. At first we used to follow the hounds, and he was delighted when I shot a hare—more delighted than I was. As far as I am concerned, hares might have free lease of their lives to the detriment of any number of plantations and cabbages. Last autumn something happened that for ever put me out of conceit with hunting. The preserves were to be thinned, and some of the chamois to be shot. Papa, who had to leave home on a short absence, entrusted the commission to me, thinking I should thoroughly enjoy the task, and I had not the courage to tell him that it

would be anything but an enjoyable one to me.

So, accompanied by the head ranger and my good gun, I sallied forth one afternoon into the peaceful shade and green depths of the deer-park. Along the moss-grown path, whence I had so often heard the rustle of the herds going down to water, we came to the pond, skirted it, and saw, through a break on the other side, a young chamois just emerging from the wood on the slope. Stretching her slender neck, she snuffed the air and came slowly forward.

"That's what we want, the female," whispered the ranger. "Take steady aim—fire!"

His lips trembled with eagerness, his old grey eyes looked mistrustfully at me. As for me, an ice-cold thrill ran through me as, raising my gun in feverish

haste and nervously pulling the trigger, I was only conscious of having taken aim. There was a report. "A dead hit!" exclaimed the ranger triumphantly, and ran forward. I slowly followed, my heart beating so loudly I could not run.

"Shot in the heart!" cried the old forester from afar. "A crack shot! Could not have been better."

Intoxicated at my success he wildly waved his hat, then begged mine that he might stick a pine twig in it. While thus engaged, and I standing there gazing with wide-open eyes at the pretty young creature lying prone, its graceful head thrown back, there appeared on the verge of the wood a tiny kid. . . .

"Good heavens, Bayer!" I exclaimed. And looking up, the ranger cried,

"My word! had she got a little one! If I had only known it!"

Meanwhile the young one came confidingly and fearlessly up to us. Surely if mother could lie so quietly on the grass by those people they would do it no harm, it thought, and began pushing its mother with its moist shining nose, and then quietly to drink in its last nourishment from the accustomed source, and when no more would come, not one drop, left off trying, and stood up looking inquiringly at its mother and at us, looking as innocently as only an animal can look. . . .

The ranger, taking it up in his arms, carried it home. It had the warmest corner in the pine plantation given to it; a little hut was built for it, with a soft bed of moss and hay. I have spent whole days by it. Never

in all my life did I desire anything so ardently as that it should grow used to me and not be afraid of me. But trustful in freedom, timid and full of mistrust in confinement, it never grew used to me, never lost its dread of me —it died.

When my dear father came home I told him I never would go shooting again. He laughed, and in my excitement I cried:

"You ought not to desire it of me. If ever I married, and had a daughter who took pleasure in shooting any living creature, I should be utterly miserable."

"Don't talk such nonsense. You have grown quite idiotic, child. And," he continued entreatingly, "and, above all, do talk in English."

Now I am going to tell of my dear father. To describe him so

accurately as that all who read these memoirs should seem to have his living presentment before them, is beyond my power; I will only endeavour to portray him as he is, and, especially, as he is to me. He really often has occasion to find fault with me. I am either too noisy and too merry, or else too much in my own room reading. He says a learned woman is the greatest of all calamities. He looks upon learning as an importunate being ever ready to spring upon one unawares, on one's making it the slightest advance. In vain do I try to comfort him with the assurance that I might know off the whole contents of my library by heart, and yet not have any pretensions to be a blue-stocking.

"Heaven grant it!" is his answer. "A woman's head should be in her heart. From

her heart and disposition should come all her understanding." He has said this so often to me, that I yesterday ventured to raise an objection.

"You tell me it must come; but it does not. There are things which even a woman cannot fathom from the mere depths of her temperament. So Baron Schwarzburg von Livland said lately; and I have not the least idea what he means, and my heart certainly has not told me."

But I am anticipating events.

There is not a single handsome book in my library that papa himself has not given me; he, who is always inveighing against love of books. Handsome, I mean here, more with regard to exterior than to interior. But happy for me that there are handsome editions of

books with irresistible illustrations. Happy for me that you have lived and sketched, Gustave Doré! To you I owe the pearl of my collection; to you is it due that my beloved father has grown almost into a bookworm —as much a bookworm, that is, as I can be called a blue-stocking. The noble knight of La Mancha it was that conquered him. At first it was the illustrations which captivated him, and on their account I acquired the book. The unimportant text, though not even English, was, as it were, thrown in with the purchase. What a surprise it was to me! I had thanked profusely for a picture book, and what a treasure had come into my possession! I could not keep my rapture in it for myself, and day by day as I read, I told the story to my father, and day by

day his interest in Dulcinea's knight grew warmer.

"What has the donkey been doing to-day?" he would ask, and for a while I suffered it to be "the donkey." Not for long though. Soon I laughed no longer; rather melted with sympathy, burned with admiration. I grew to love the man ever deceived, but ever believing; the knight so often worsted, but never vanquished; and declared to my father that I desired no better fortune than to meet with such a Don Quixote in real life and become his wife. Then papa began to think I was getting too excited over it, and it would be well to change the course of our studies. And from that time he took to overlooking my reading, and got to do what he had never done before—to read. And it would have been

impossible to see anything more beautiful than the expression of devotion and absorption in his noble Wallenstein-like countenance, in every fold of the fine brow, when thus engaged. Sometimes he heaves a deep sigh, and twists one side of his moustache so furiously that the point is all awry, his eyes get fixed, the eyelids red with the unwonted application. Then I can stand it no longer; I jump up, go to him, and giving him a light kiss on the shoulder, so light that he can pretend he does not perceive it, say:

"Shall we go for a walk, papa? I am quite stiff with sitting."

"Upon my word, so am I," he says, and it does me good to see how he straightens himself and draws in a free breath. But he does not immediately carry out

my suggestion; the book-marker must first be deliberately placed in the page:

"So far," he takes the perused pages between the palms of his hands. "Will it be too little for you?"

And I, unthinking, ungrateful as I can be, have so often thoughtlessly made reply, "Oh, much too little; why, it is hardly anything. You must let me read on further, papa."

Closing the book, he slowly shakes his head, looks at me, considers a little, looks at me again, and then follows: "Do whatever you like!"

And I, before he can defend himself, rush into his arms.

"No, no, only what *thou likest*, not what *I like*, shall be done, now and always."

"You might just as well have said that in English," he answers

"Oh, you dear good father of mine!"

Last year my sister, for the first time since her marriage, passed the winter in Vienna. Report said that her husband on the wedding journey had informed her that she should not set foot in the capital again until he had cured her of her "countess" ways.

He is a tall, cold, haughty man, who barely vouchsafes to utter twenty words in a day, even when most loquacious. It is difficult to know what his tastes are. The sole interests he seems to have are his palace, his equipages, his servants' liveries, and his wife's toilettes; and that merely to show them off. She makes merry over it, and sometimes says very witty things about it; but I think she would

do better if she were to say them to his face instead of behind his back. She has no children, to my sorrow; I should so love to be an aunt. It was decided that I was to come out at one of the balls my sister was to give in the course of the season. I had already been to several soirées the previous winter with papa during Lent; thus had a tolerably extended acquaintance with society folk, and had been mostly struck by the dead level of quality when taken in the quantity. At seventeen one begins to exercise one's thinking powers, and my reflection had been: if one could disembody the souls of all these fine people and let them go free (the men especially), it would be a sheer impossibility to distinguish one from the other.

Their conversation was simply comical. I could tell off on my

fingers the set questions: "Are you coming out next Carnival?" "Are you fond of dancing?" so often had they been put to me; and not a man among them had appeared to me to be one whit different from the crowd of others.

One morning I was informed that papa and mamma desired to see me in the small drawing-room—style: *Empire*, white and gold.

Mamma was sitting upon the sofa, knitting woollen comforters for the Reformatory. With a dainty little white lace cap upon her head, and her white India Cashmere morning dress, she looked a queen or a saint. Papa was sitting beside her in an armchair, very erect and agitated, as could be easily seen from the blinking of his eyes, a trick he had when much moved. My Duphot, in her boundless

diffidence, had chosen for her seat the smallest possible tabouret with the most slender of legs, and the effect of her corpulent person upon its etherial support was killing.

"Will you be pleased to be seated?" my father asked, with forced gaiety, and I took a chair as close as possible to my Duphot, so as to be at hand to lend my aid in the event of a catastrophe.

The faces of my parents grew more and more solemn. A sudden feeling of dread came over me, and I began to examine my conscience if perchance—— It was clear, thank Heaven, else I should have felt very miserable.

My father looked expectantly at my mother.

"Caroline, will you have the kindness?"

"I thought that you meant to——" returned my mother.

"Oh, no, I beg you——" said he. And with an effort, and dropping the hands upon the comforter, my mother began:

"Paula, you are now grown up, nearly eighteen——"

"And look as if you were twenty," added my father; to which my Duphot, making assent, becomes scarlet, and totters upon her treacherous seat.

My mother continues: "Next year, dear child, you are to go out into the great world."

"Oh, yes, I am so glad, dear mamma."

"You are glad because you do not know how poor and worthless are the pleasures which await you there, and how dearly bought."

"Yes, yes," put in papa, "and one should ask oneself *cui bono*, what is the aim of it all?"

Mamma took up the argument:

"None other than that of self-examination, and to enable one to arrive at the conclusion, *que le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle*. Every one plays at the game for a time, my dear Paula, because it is the correct thing to do."

"Oh, and because it is amusing, mamma, and because one is young and loves gaiety and dancing!"

She assented.

"But thinking persons cannot hide from themselves the consciousness of the hollowness of it all, and then they turn to the realities of life, often bitterly to repent of their wasted years. Now my question to you is: Were it not wiser to save yourself these wasted years, and to begin at once with the realities of life?"

"It is but a question," inter-

posed my father, in a tone of deepest affection, and I read in his words the silent refrain "Do whatever you like."

"Yes, certainly, it is but a question," assented mamma.

And my Duphot echoed, "*Une question*," while drops of perspiration stood out upon her forehead. Her trouble and agitation overcame me. I thought, "Great heavens! what can they be meaning to do with me?" And seized with a sudden dread, I cried:

"Am I to go into a convent?"

Mamma smiled, papa laughed; Madame Duphot blurted out: "*Tout au contraire*!"

I grew still more agitated. Suddenly it flashed across me, "Then I am going to be married!"

Papa patted me kindly on the

shoulder. "You must surely have observed that one of the gentlemen introduced to you at your sister's house has been paying you marked attention?"

"No, papa. I assure you I have not."

"But he has conversed with you every evening; the last time he remained a full half-hour in conversation with you."

"Who is it?"

"Count Taxen."

"A tall, dark man?"

"No, a fair young man, of middle height."

At length I remembered. Of course, a fair young man, of middle height, had often come up to talk to me. About what? Had I been placed on the rack I could not have told, so completely had the subject of our various talks vanished from my memory.

Papa and mamma now imparted to me that he was an exceptionally delightful young man, the darling of his mother, who had never allowed him to be separated from her, and had brought him up with the strictest principles. My parents actually vied with each other in singing the Count's praises, and Madame Duphot, with tears of emotion, exclaimed enthusiastically:

"*Quel bonheur, mon enfant!*"

The gate bell struck twice.

"They are coming," said my mother; and my father gave, oh, such a loving look at me! I cannot describe it other, even had it been enveloped in ever so tyrannical a "You shall, you must!" than the old gentle, heart-stirring, tender, "Do whatever you like." And my oppressed heart beat freely once

more, my downcast courage revived—I even felt an irresistible longing to laugh; while Madame Duphot, who had made a precipitate movement to rise from her tabouret—it had really belonged to Josephine's *salon*—fell back upon it, and I said:

"Do take care; or you will go to pieces like the French Empire."

"Child—child!" remonstrated my mother.

"And now, whatever you do, no display of blue stockingism," added my father, hurriedly, as the door was thrown open and the Countess Taxen and her son were announced.

And from that day forth they appeared regularly twice a week at three o'clock, to make their afternoon call; and, moreover, every Saturday I met the Count

at my sister's. My parents treated him with marked attention. Madame Duphot designated him "*un jeune homme accompli.*" Even my brother-in-law, whom I had never seen unbend before, did so to him. The Countess never failed to tell me, in her conversations with me, that her son had never caused her an uneasy hour, and that she was to be esteemed the happiest of mothers. I should have gone contrary to the wishes of my dear ones, and of those whose opinion I valued, had I found the least objection to the state of things; and yet, withal, I felt the strongest inclination to do so, though without knowing why.

No formal proposal had been made. I was only told that the Count was attracted by me; and that, through his mother, he had

begged permission to become more nearly acquainted with me. It must, however, in his estimation, have been of far greater importance that I should know him than that he should know me, for his whole conversation was about himself, his mode of life, his habits and tastes. He seemed especially to like to dilate upon his love of order, and the punctuality he exacted from his *entourage*. He graphically described to us his old historic castle, the arrangements of the apartments, the decorations of its halls and corridors. We heard less of the country where his estates were situated; of the people living about, not one word.

"And what about the neighbourhood?" my sister asked one day. And Bernhard, my brother, home on leave, exclaimed:

"Bruno Schwarzburg must have lived somewhere in your vicinity before his troubles."

Thus, on April 13, 1882, for the first time I heard the name afterwards to be so dear to me. They began talking and laughing about him as a half-mad man, Bernhard constantly putting in, good-naturedly, "After all, he is a fine fellow!"

"Yes, with a bee in his bonnet," returned the Count. "He will never make his fortune, as I have often told him, even at the time he was doing the craziest thing of all and entering an action against himself."

"How could he do that?" I asked. "How can any one enter an action against themselves?"

"Ah, how can one!" replied the Count; "I don't understand it, nor would any other man with

a grain of common sense in his composition. His father, who left a heap of debts behind him, had had the foresight just before his death to hand over to his son, by deed of gift, the indisputable possession of a small capital. The father dead, the creditors seize upon everything —a set of miserable money-lenders, for the most part, who had been paid over and over again during the old Baron's lifetime. But one widow woman with five children——"

"Excuse me," interrupted Bernhard, "one daughter, a blind girl."

The Count, who does not like to have his statements questioned, here said impatiently—

"My dear fellow, what does it matter? . . . So this widow came off badly," he resumed, turning to me. "'Nothing is left,' she

was told when she presented her claim. 'What do you mean—there is my money,' says Bruno. 'The creditors have no claim upon that,' explains the lawyer, who was also Schwarzburg's trustee. His father, I must explain, had taken the precaution to appoint a trustee, as Master Bruno had already shown signs of emulating his progenitor in the matter of squandering. So now he insists upon paying the widow's claim; the trustee objects, and the upshot of it was a trial, in which Schwarzburg appeared as plaintiff against himself, and which he won by losing the little property he had."

The laughter was general, and more things were told about the man whom they all seemed to look upon as an original.

But I thought to myself, all

his mad pranks—and many were told of all kinds and descriptions—seem always to agree in two points: there is invariably a noble motive at the bottom of them, and he invariably comes off worst in them. So I remarked:

"This Baron certainly seems to do any number of foolish things, but luck is very unkind to him."

"That I cannot see," returned the Count; and I had already learned to know that those words, with him, meant, If I do not see a thing, it does not exist. "If I choose to do idiotic things, I have no right to call myself unlucky because I find myself on the wrong side of the hedge. Moreover, what people are so ready to call want of luck is, more often than not, want of sense. A common-sense man is rarely unlucky."

Here Bernhard murmured half aloud, "Sickness, death, tempest."

Again the irritation with which the Count greets the most modest expression of opinion became evident—an irritation he seems incapable of checking—as he drily observed:

"I ensure against tempest."

I felt a sudden exasperation against this child of fortune, who seemed so disposed to take to himself as individual merit the lavish gifts of Providence, and I rejoined:

"Had you had such a father as that of Baron Schwarzburg, who squandered away all the family property, you would have been unable to exercise that wise foresight, for you would have had nothing left to you worth ensuring."

His mother crimsoned, my parents exchanged a concerned

look, and I felt more than ever alarmed at my own temerity. The greatest of heroes experience a reflex fear, we are told; but there was nothing of the hero in me at that moment, only a rush of feelings of shame, embarrassment, and dread; and these wretched feelings rose like smoke, so to speak, from a still darker background—the knowledge that I had offended the Count!

He gave vent to a few disconnected phrases, intended to be severe and cutting, but which were only savage and peevish. It was not the first time that I had made a mental note that the exalted and noble diffidence, so highly vaunted by my parents, was in inseparable connection with the flattery and deference accorded to him. The slightest expression of censure changed it

at once into arrogance, and, without an attempt at justifying his opinion, he would angrily reject any comment as absurd, contemptible, and unworthy of notice.

After he had taken his leave, my parents began to reproach me severely.

"You behaved shockingly. You seem to have no idea of the honour conferred upon you by the Count's attentions. Such a man—such a son!"

"Who never caused his mother a single uneasy hour," I meekly added.

"You are aware of that, and yet do not cherish the highest esteem for him?"

"Of course, I esteem what is estimable in him."

"Then pray show it in your manner and bearing. You acknowledge that you esteem the Count. and have every reason

so to do, then why conceal the sentiment?" said mamma. "I entreat you, dear child, to let your esteem for him be made more evident."

She glanced meaningly at papa, and now he began begging me to show my esteem for the Count more openly; asking how it was that I, so pleasant and amiable to people in general, should observe such a cold and distant manner to this admirable young man.

Alas, I could give him no answer. It was a question I had too often vainly asked myself. The trivial faults which struck me in the Count, were as nothing compared to the good qualities he possessed in the eyes of my parents. And so I promised them from henceforth to be much more courteous and attentive to him than I had

been before. But even this did not quite satisfy my dear ones.

"See, Paula," said my father, earnestly — and his voice was agitated—"see, dear child, your sister's marriage with Edward has brought her happiness and placed her in a brilliant position. No man could be a more affectionate husband than he, and so true a *grand seigneur*. Your brother, after having caused us much anxiety by his thoughtlessness, has settled down into the right way; and thus we can look forward to both their futures with easy minds. . . . All we desire now is to be able to feel that your happiness is ensured."

"And that we should do," began mamma afresh, "if you, dear child, would receive the Count's attentions favourably."

"Yes," resumed papa, "that

would make us happy and contented."

He stretched out his hand to me; I seized it and kissed it, and suddenly felt a sharp pain in my eyes, and as through a quivering mist saw his dear face become more and more gentle and tender, and then the dear voice began:

"Besides——"

But the words which usually followed upon this beginning were wanting. I waited yearningly—in vain. They remained unsaid.

That night, on going to bed, I prayed more earnestly than ever; and yet my prayer was that of a foolish child. I prayed for strength to obey my parents gladly and cheerfully; I ought to have framed my prayer quite differently—that I was quickly to be taught in the immediate future.

On the 24th of April, 1882—one of the most perfect days I can remember—we were driving in the open carriage in the Prater, papa and I.

The horse-chestnuts were beginning to blossom, the delicate green of spring diffusing its halo all around; that green so tender and so unspeakably joyous, just emerging from its winter covering into the golden sunlight, all unconscious, as yet, of storm or scorching heat.

Our carriage rolled leisurely along by our Rotten Row. Friends and acquaintances galloped or trotted past us; then three horsemen abreast came towards us—the Count in the middle. He was riding a handsome chestnut; man and horse alike presenting an air of comfortable self-satisfaction. "The world goes well with us," they

seemed to be thinking—if they thought at all. On the Count's left rode my brother, looking very handsome and spick and span, in his uniform of major in the Lancers. To his right rode a gaunt man on a gaunt steed. He sat very erect upon his horse, which seemed as if devoured by inward fire, so wild and beautiful were its fine eyes; for the rest it was a long-legged, bony mare—to say the least of it, positively ugly. Nor did its rider please at first sight. Luckily for him, no one would be content with merely a single glance at the striking countenance. Long and narrow, it reveals a quite unusual amount of energy. The dark eyes, the nose with its dilating nostrils, the sharply pointed beard, the moustache twirling high and leaving the mouth free, reminded me of the portraits of Spanish noblemen of

the seventeenth century. But what reminded me of no one, and could be compared to no one but himself, was the animated, sympathetic spirit that sparkled in his eyes. Gravely bowing, he retained his hat in his hand long after the Count had resumed his, thus displaying a noble broad forehead, surmounted by thick, waving hair. The brain, I once read, shapes its own place, and his had formed an arch for itself. I know some which are content to reside under a flat level. The stranger looked observantly at me. I felt myself grow red under his gaze, and touched papa's arm, who was exchanging greetings in the drive. He turned to me, and, following my eyes, recognised the rider.

"Do you know him?" I asked.

"Who?"

"He of La Mancha," said I,

with a sorry jest, to conceal my confusion.

Papa, not noticing it, answered: "Oh, yes. It is that mad fellow, Schwarzburg."

My presence of mind had returned, and I ventured to ask:

"Tell me more about his foolish doings."

"I know nothing about him," said papa.

"Oh, yes, you do. Bernhard is constantly talking of him."

"To make fun of him."

"Not always. He really likes and admires him, and says he has a great future before him."

"Then things must greatly alter."

"Not so much, after all, dear papa—a little turn of fortune's wheel; so far he has had nothing but sorrow since his childhood. Remember what Bernhard told us quite lately about him. His

parents separated; his mother living abroad and married again; his father, a spendthrift, caring nothing for the boy—worse off than an orphan; ill-used at school, because the payments were so irregular. And he grows up, struggling through it all, and, even as a mere lad, takes a man's cares upon himself and sets to earning his living. . . ."

"Yes, yes, but then his Don Quixotism with his small inheritance, and his ridiculous love story."

"Love story? That is odd."

An unpleasant sensation came over me, and I thought it strange that Bernhard had told me nothing of this love story. After a while, I asked:

"Who was he in love with, this Baron?"

Papa had thought no more of our conversation, and could not

at first think whom I meant; then answered abruptly:

"He can only adore her memory now. She is dead."

"When?"

"Some years ago, as the wife of another man, whom she preferred to him—ingratitude to fidelity which would have gained him a name in the Middle Ages, but which in modern times has simply made him ridiculous."

"I do not understand that. How can the exercise of any virtue render any one ridiculous? And fidelity is a virtue!"

Papa gave a slight cough, "If you ride a virtue to death, it becomes folly."

Wisdom—folly. I hated those words, so often in the Count's mouth.

"Ah, well, papa," said I, "it seems to me that there is no need for any virtue to grow into

folly; it is a folly from the very beginning. That is why I have so little regard for wisdom either."

"That is very evident," observed my father.

"And why I love the constancy which, seeking no reward, yet remains staunch."

"Indeed? You do not see how senseless it is in a man to believe he is loved by a woman when he is not? To let himself be fooled by her? To give no ear when he is told she does not care a straw for him? You do not see how senseless is such conduct? Or, perhaps, it rather attracts your admiration because it is such a piece of utter folly!"

"But did she really not love him?"

"She simply fooled him, I tell you. And he, poor fool, must needs be keeping lover's watch

under her windows, quarrelling with those who saw through the little game, which cost him more than one duel."

I was delighted.

"Quite right! I honour him! I can see it now—can hear how after the fight, whether conquered or conqueror, he cries, 'Dulcinea del Toboso is the most peerless lady in all the world, and I am her true knight!' Splendid, papa!"

"My dear child! What rubbish you talk! But it all comes from those confounded books, and I will . . . But enough of it!"

These last words were said in English, and I knew it was high time to give up a subject when my dear good father took to speaking English!

For some weeks past mamma had begun to receive again,

every evening after the theatre. She desired to give the Count opportunities of coming more frequently to our house, without thereby exciting attention. Fruitless endeavour! Although his courtship proceeded so quietly that, thank Heaven, even I was scarcely aware of it, my girl friends began teasing me about him. Most of them, strange to say, called me a lucky girl; and one—I will name her Dora—never failed to add "but as silly, awfully silly, as she is lucky!"

She is older than I am, and is considered to be very clever and well read. When quite a little girl, an aunt, who was a woman of learning, bequeathed her whole library to her, and she was allowed to have it arranged in her own room; her parents letting her have her own way

in everything. Thus at thirteen there was she deep in the study of Humboldt's "Cosmos," and Strauss's "Life of Jesus." She has explained whole pages of this latter to me, but not very clearly; I never could understand it.

Dora used often to threaten that if I did not know how to value the Count better, she would get him away from me. And I, only too ready, would reply—

"Take him, by all means; you could not please me better."

For a long time she thought I was only joking.

"Do you know," she said, "that the Taxens have a prince's crown in their coat-of-arms?"

"How could one fail to know it?"

"And have you not thought

how well your monogram will look with a crown over it?"

I burst into a fit of laughter.

"Is that the result of studying Humboldt and Strauss at thirteen, to make you such a baby at twenty?"

"Oh, that is quite another thing. I know what is due to the world. The greatest men of learning attach value to position, and would be only too glad to be admitted into princely salons—but as they are so prosy and pedantic——"

Indignant at her silly chatter, I cried—

"You ought to be ashamed to talk such rubbish. Pray what do you know about learned men; you have never even seen one!"

"Nor you either."

"No, nor any one of us, because they do not frequent society, nor have the slightest

wish to do so. But you are talking about what you do not understand. You prate about knowledge of the world, and see no further than your own little circle. That is all you think about!"

She was *piqued.* She is as much accustomed to be admired as the Count, and can as little as he endure to be contradicted.

Our passage of arms had been carried on before a room full of my friends, of both sexes, to their great delectation. Dora was not a favourite among her girl friends, and they chuckled audibly at my onslaught.

"You may be as contemptuous as you please," said Dora angrily, but in so low a voice that only I heard. "You will see the consequences of having made an enemy of me," with a meaning look towards the door, by which

the Count was just then entering.

I understood her, and answered in an equally low voice:

"If you only succeed in what you mean, you will make me a friend for life."

"Very well, I accept your challenge!" she responded, little knowing how I was silently rejoicing in her determination, and wishing it all speed.

The Count stood before me; and it seemed as if with his presence the atmosphere about me had become more oppressive, the light darkened. Dora rising, left him the chair opposite to me, and seated herself on the arm of mine. In her white gauze dress, and hair so becomingly arranged, she looked charming, as charming as a Dresden china figure; and the contrast between her bewitching get-up and the con-

versation she carried on was irresistibly funny.

"I wager," exclaimed the Count, "that the thermometer is up to 28°."

"If it were 38°," said she, "I should not feel it. I am never warm. I am the marble guest."

With an uninterested look the Count murmured,

"Yes?"

"But also, I never feel the cold."

"Ha, ha! You are doing the original. I am not at all original; perfectly prosaic."

"Oh! I am very prosaic. Would you believe it?—I take snuff."

"Indeed?"

"I always carry my snuff-box about with me."

"With nothing in it?"

She produced a tiny gold box, no larger than a florin, from her pocket.

"There happens to be nothing in it, just to-day. Look, I have had a death's head engraved on the lid; and I use death's-head notepaper. I am always thinking of death. . . . I believe I shall commit suicide one day."

The Count looked aghast.

"I always carry a dagger about with me."

"Do you really?" said the Count.

"So that I may plunge it into my heart the moment that tobacco, my one friend, has no more charms for me."

He smiled. He began to find her interesting; and as she now went on to tell of a curious old chest which had been discovered in a lumber room of her castle, he became thoroughly engrossed. Seizing an opportunity when they were absorbed in their conversation, I rose and stole away. As

I turned, I saw Bernhard standing by me.

"I have been looking for you ever so long," said he. "One cannot stir a step in this crush."

And looking round, he called:

"Schwarzburg!"

And I, surprised and so delighted, as though it had been some dear, impatiently looked-for friend, exclaimed:

"Is he here?"

Now, be it said, Bernhard scolded me afterwards, quite roundly, for my "Is he here?" But I have never been able to repent it. As I said it, I looked into a pair of eyes radiant with bliss, far too great for me ever to repent the words which called it forth.

Baron Schwarzburg bowed so low before me, that the reverence thus expressed in his salutation

almost abashed me. What had I done to arouse reverence?

We had a long talk together, much too long, I was afterwards told reproachfully. I cannot say what it was about; I was unconscious of the lapse of time, and of the presence of others. He was talking to me, and all that he said and his manner of saying it was pleasant to me, and worth listening to; seemed better and wiser than anything I had ever heard before; at once dear and true.

When, looking back to that evening, I ask myself the question: Was that when we first made acquaintance? I answer, No; we did not need it; we greeted each other as friends of long standing; our first meeting was as a coming together after separation.

Our conversation was inter-

rupted by papa. He wanted to consult with the Baron concerning some matters connected with his estate, and Bernhard had told him that he could not do better than put them into his hands. Both gentlemen engaged in earnest conversation; and at its close I saw them shake hands, and felt quite elated. So the fool of a Schwarzburg could talk sensibly for once—his advice could even be of use!

The *soirée* was over. Most of the guests had left. Among the last to go were Dora and her people, and the Count and his mother. The *Comtesse douairière*, as my Duphot called her, was especially amiable to me on saying good-night.

"You are so sweet, dear child, I quite admired you. How charming you were this evening towards that poor Baron, the *attaché* fel-

low! But do not forget that there may be a danger of your good-nature being misunderstood. That class of person does not always know how to accept our notice, and is often made uncomfortable by our desire to make them feel *à leur aise* in our society——"

I hardly knew what to make of this comment; whether to take it as one of praise or blame.

I will not attempt to describe my simple love-story at length. That my parents would consent to my marriage with Baron Schwarzburg, the "*attaché* fellow," I did not for a moment believe. The consciousness of my love for him and of its hopelessness revealed themselves simultaneously to me; and it would have been a grave wrong in me had I given myself up to

the former. But I had not given myself up to it; it had taken hold of me before I was aware, and from the first moment I was as completely under its sway as I am to this day. It was the same with him. His affection for me came as suddenly, as did my great love for him. It was only his perfect absence of vanity which for a long time made him think it impossible that he could inspire me with any warmer feelings than those of friendship. But even that seemed to make him supremely happy; and as for me—a new life had unfolded to me since he had taken me into his confidence, and since I had learned to know the workings of his noble, unselfish heart. He had met almost on every side with injustice, and yet he always held that Right must conquer. He had endured countless bitter-

nesses, yet had come through them without one taint of bitterness. Truly with such a fund of love and strength in his own heart, how should he believe in anything but goodness?

The wonderful thing to me is that his own estimate of himself should be so different from what he really is. He affirms the motive of the greater part of his actions, and the source of all his strength, to have been self-will. The other day when he was repeating this to me, I asked:

"And was it mere act of self-will that led you, as a young barrister, to enter that action against yourself?"

He replied, with a frown, "Is that old story not yet forgotten?"

"Not yet."

"Then allow me to give you the true reading of it. It was undertaken in no ridiculous spirit

of self-sacrifice, but in order to defend my integrity against my money; a thing of priceless worth against that which has a marketable value. My client was the widow of an estimable man and faithful old servant; the money in question his savings honestly earned. How many years back the sum had been in all confidence entrusted to his master's keeping, the wife did not know. She only knew that his master had repeatedly assured him that the money had been invested in a thoroughly sound mortgage. What the mortgage was her husband had no idea, and as the widow of the baron's most faithful and devoted servant it would never have occurred to her to ask if her money was safely invested, or in what. All very well, the lawyer said, but why was the woman so

stupid? Could she not see what was going on, and how the baron was making ducks and drakes of his property? She had seen it all, but trusted to her lord's word more than to the evidence of her senses. And for that implicit trust, was she to be made the victim, and was her master's son to consent to such plunder? Could he? What is your opinion, Countess; how would you have acted in his place?"

My answer was, "As you did."

"And would that have been anything extraordinary?"

"No; only what was right."

"Thank God!" he exclaimed, while a great peaceful joy illumined his countenance; "only what was right. Yes, that is it."

He looked radiant.

"Why thank God?" I asked.

"Because I have been permitted to justify myself to you."

"You justify yourself — to me!" I said in some confusion.

"And because you made it so easy to me, and because you have such a clear insight into things, and such an upright mind. Above all, that you concede that we only do what is right, even must we defend that right-doing to our own loss."

"But is not that natural?"

"No, egotism is natural. And the world just now prizes it highly. Take up any newspaper, and you will read any number of articles in favour of it and its ally, 'healthy realism.' In this age of humanitarianism—strange anomaly—we find idealism arraigned, and every kind of unusual display of self-denial, that groundwork and absolute necessity of humanitarianism, stigma-

tised as sickly and sentimental. . . ."

Here the Count, my sister, and Dora came up to us.

"Aha, here is the Baron laying down the law!" exclaimed the Count.

And Schwarzburg, looking dismayed, turned apologetically to me, saying:

"Is it true—was I really laying down the law?"

"It is rather a habit of yours," interposed the Count, assuming the cold haughty manner of people in society, to those not so highly privileged, and that to me is so narrow and petty.

"You were certainly not laying down the law," I cried; "on the contrary, you were telling me something of great interest."

"A secret?" giggled Dora.

"Certainly not."

"Then pray impart your inte-

resting story to us, especially if it is not too long. But I fear it is long—as long-winded as it is interesting. I have been watching you at a distance. You are always so vastly entertaining, you two."

My cheek crimsoned, and Baron Schwarzburg levelled a look at Dora which spoiled all inclination to pursue her ill-bred jesting further. But it had done its work, and bore ill consequences for me. Count Taxen did not stir from my side the remainder of the evening; and we carried on a melancholy duologue anent ancient castellated halls and old armour! "A mould and mildew type of conversation," as Elizabeth calls it, when her husband, who is uncommonly like the Count in essentials, begins one of his interminable talks with her on that theme. I saw her

look across at me several times with unconcealed commiseration.

The next day she came to talk over matters with me. It was early in the afternoon, and I had just gone up to my room after luncheon, when she came in.

She began taking off her bonnet and arranging a refractory lock displaced by the wind, apparently very intent on so doing; but I could see very plainly that her thoughts were nowise occupied by the lovely, intellectual-looking face reflected in the looking-glass. Suddenly she began:

"Tell me, child, what are you meaning by this Schwarzburg worship of yours?"

Her unexpected question took me by surprise, and I answered in a low voice:

"What can I mean?"

"That is what I want to

know. I want to know what you are thinking, what dreams you are allowing yourself to indulge in! Do you know that for some time past you are quite altered?"

I felt myself growing more and more downhearted.

"How altered, Elizabeth?"

"Oh," she said, "do not let us waste time in fencing. The manner in which you distinguish Schwarzburg is the subject of general remark. You make your almost veneration of him so ostentatiously apparent."

"I do not make it ostentatiously apparent; I only do not conceal it."

"And what is it to lead to?"

"It will lead to nothing," I answered dejectedly. "In a few weeks he goes to Bosnia; and I to Trostburg."

Shrugging her shoulders, she

made a few steps forward, then sat down on the chair before my writing-table. The volume with "My Memoirs" written large upon it attracted her attention; her face relaxed its grave expression, and she began to laugh.

"So the child has taken to writing her 'Memoirs'; here are all the secrets—one need only to look in and find them all laid bare. Do not look so frightened. I am curious, but not indiscreet."

While her words were sarcastic, her great blue eyes were so sincere, were looking at me with such a depth of love and sympathy, that, taking courage, I went up to her and said:

"You asked me, what I want. I will confess to you what I do not want; I will not marry Count Taxen."

"Bravo, that is good," she an-

swered, phlegmatically. "And what about the Count, who purposes either to-day or to-morrow to make formal proposal for your hand?"

In deadly fear, I cried:

"How do you know this?"

"From himself."

"And does he not see how utterly indifferent he is to me?"

"No. That would be the last thing he would be likely to see."

"And how much more, how unspeakably more, I prefer another to him?"

"That still less. A Count Taxen simply considers it an impossibility that a Baron Schwarzburg should be preferred before him."

"And Dora, who is a thousand times better suited to him, and who promised me that she would make capture of him—Dora, on

whom I have set my hopes—why is she not as good as her word?"

"Because she cannot, sweet Simplicity. Because she has done all in her power, but in vain. She is not to the Count's taste. He scents the egotist in her, and is too utterly the egotist himself not to avoid his duplicate."

"Oh! what can I do, Elizabeth, what can I do? If I have to marry the Count—I shall die of despair."

She threw her arms round me, and drew me down to her, and I laid my cheek upon her wavy hair.

"Do you really think so?" she asked. "I believe you might manage to be not so desperately unhappy with him. Only you need to be a little wise, my pet; do not go against him in little

things, and you would soon find that you had your own way in more important ones. You would have to be very careful not to hurt his vanity, and where possible to sing his praises to him."

"What, flatter him!" I cried, "praise what I do not approve! Flattery! oh the shame and disgrace of it!"

"Do not give it such high-sounding names," said she; "to be a bad wife is the only shame and disgrace to a woman. In comparison with that, any self-imposed humiliation weighs but lightly in the scale. And after all, it is but a case of weighing one evil against another, a compromise with the enemy, otherwise called the ills of life. Perfect happiness, cloudless, whose lot is it? Who even may indulge an unbroken dream of it?"

"Oh, were it only a matter of a dream, I should soon be in possession of it."

"Indeed! Then trust me, and put your dream into words."

"Dare I? May I?"

"You must."

"Do not forget that it is only a dream."

"Well—begin."

"I should dream that I was his—you know whom I mean—and had no more ardent wish than to make life, hitherto so hard to him, sweet and beautiful. At his side I would grow wise, and clever, and better day by day. Every breath I drew would be a song of praise to him. Did, however, so strange a thing happen, that he could ever do a thing my conscience did not approve, I would tell it him, frankly, freely. I would shrink from no pain; for he would be

there to bear it with me, and its burden would be lightened. What pain could come to me, so long as I was his, and his love mine?"

"Yes," said Elizabeth, in a low, stifled voice—"yes."

"That is what my dream is like—the purest bliss. But the reality is horror—horror, Elizabeth! You have utterly crushed me. That miserable compromise; that mean-spirited subjection in order to preserve the outward appearance of unity while hiding the inward disunion—I could not do it. And you?——"

A horrible thought had flashed across me; I bent down and looked into her face: it was bathed in tears. "Can you do it, my darling?" I said, sinking on my knees, and embracing her.

She pressed me convulsively,

and agonising sobs shook her breast, as she answered:

"I have learnt to do it!"

For a time we preserved deep silence. When at length I raised my eyes to her dear face, it wore its accustomed look of composure.

She rose.

"Come with me to our parents, child," she said. "I cannot help you to the realisation of your dream; but you shall not be sacrificed."

Mamma was sitting in the corner of the sofa, knitting. Madame Duphot was reading aloud to her Ozanani's "Poëtas Francis Caius."

"May we come in, mamma? We want to speak to you."

Without looking up, mamma answered:

"Please let us just finish the chapter. Sit down, girls."

We sat down, and Madame Duphot finished the beautiful legend of the Holy Francis and Wolf von Gubbio. Then placing her book over which she had several times hurriedly glanced at me, on the table, she rose.

I caught her hand.

"Stay!" I whispered to her; and Elizabeth hurriedly joined in.

"Stay, dear Duphot, we count upon your help. We want papa here too, as well. May I send to ask him to come, mamma?"

"Yes, ask him to come."

Dear mamma! so unsuspectingly and peacefully going on with her work, meditating over the sweet teaching of St. Francis, I felt so sorry for her. How gladly would I have spared her the pain I was about to cause her, but—how could I?

The door opened. Papa came in, but not alone; my brother

was with him. The eyes of both were directed upon me as they came in.

"Oh, yes, there she is," said papa, in a severe, menacing voice.

I wanted to rise, but my knees shook too violently, and I could only stretch out my hand to seize his as he passed me. He drew it hastily back, and going across to the sofa, sat down by mamma. My brother subsided on to a chair near them; and Madame Duphot, who had been sitting by mamma, diffident as ever, pushed her *tabouret* a little further back. My sister and I sat at a little distance from them, like a criminal and his counsel before his judges.

"Dear papa, dear mamma," began Elizabeth, "in Paula's name I would pray you ask the Count to cease paying his ad-

dresses to her. Paula cannot like him, and is determined that she will not marry him."

I was dismayed and terrified at the abrupt manner in which she said this.

Madame Duphot sighed.

Bernhard muttered "Oho!"

My father and mother were silent.

"It is Paula's earnest hope," resumed Elizabeth, "that you, dear father and mother, will give your sanction to her decision."

"Oh, do!" I broke in; "be merciful. I will be for ever grateful to you. I cannot marry Count Taxen. I do not feel the smallest particle of affection for him; rather the reverse."

"Does that mean that you have a dislike to him?" exclaimed papa angrily. "Who has been putting such folly into

your head? I suppose your elder sister?"

"For all I hold dearest in the world, do not think that! It is I who have implored her to intercede for me with you."

"In the first place," said mamma, "you need no one to intercede between you and your parents, but should have come in all confidence to them yourself. In the second place, your sister, instead of being so ready to take this office upon herself, should have pointed out to you how foolish it is to have allowed any such fancy not only to exist, but to be blurted out before us, and for which there is not the slightest reason."

"She declares it—that is her reason!" returned Elizabeth.

Her voice, before somewhat veiled, was now as hard and sharp as when first she came to

me. I drew nearer to her, and put my arm round her—her whole frame quivered.

"Folly—folly," repeated papa. "We cannot listen to such trash."

"The Count is an upright, honourable man; well bred, good looking, and of unexceptionable manners; a man with whom you could not fail to be happy, Paula," pronounced mamma, in severe and uncompromising tones. "You may not love him now, but you will certainly learn to do so, when it has become your duty."

A shudder ran through me, and I stammered out:

"No, mamma, no! I shall never learn to love him, because I——"

The confession I was about to make died away upon my lips. I turned a look of entreaty upon

my sister. Her lovely face was aflame; with arms crossed upon her breast, she was looking unflinchingly, an expression of reproach and indignation in her eyes, at mamma.

"Do you remember," she said, "some seventeen years ago addressing that same promise to me, and without about as much justification? My suitor too, was upright, well bred, and good looking. Now, mother dear, as you have not seen or guessed how matters stand with me, hear once for all: your promise has *not* brought its fulfilment. . . ."

"Elizabeth!" cried my father and mother together.

Bernhard, who at first had listened with somewhat sceptical smile, suddenly sunk his head. Madame Duphot had risen, and slipped out of the room like a

shadow. With a calm, that chilled me to the heart, Elizabeth continued:

"That love, which as a matter of course was to come with marriage, enveloping me in blessed blindness, in happy deception, came not. My heart remained cold, my eyes clear, and with those clear eyes of mine I saw my upright, well-bred husband through and through——" She gave a short hard laugh. "It was no edifying spectacle."

I had been so shocked at Elizabeth's words, above all by the decided manner in which she had said them, that I had not ventured to look at my parents. I cast a furtive glance at the chair previously occupied by Bernhard. It was empty; my brother had risen, and was standing by the window near to which Elizabeth was sitting; looking

earnestly at her, but, to my relief, not angrily.

"What does this mean?" asked papa. "What accusation do you bring against your husband? He has never acted other than as a gentleman; never been guilty of a single reprehensible action."

"Never! He has never wronged another in the matter of honour or property," returned Elizabeth; "nor has he ever, of his own free will, stirred a finger to help another, let alone made any sacrifice for any one, has never forgotten self for the sake of any living creature. He has no notion of generosity, or of the beautiful, save"—and a roguish look flashed across her face—"when he comes across it in the shape of some old oak chest, or rusty spur, lost four centuries ago by some brave knight intent

on plundering a travelling merchant."

"My dear Elizabeth!" said Bernhard reproachfully, as, standing now behind her, he laid his hand on the back of her chair.

"I know I ought not to talk like this," she answered. "It has never happened before, and would not to-day, were it not for the sake of saving this child from the fate which has befallen me."

Dear mamma was in a state of greatest agitation and perplexity.

"You exaggerate cruelly, Elizabeth," said she, reproachfully. "You accuse your parents, and speak unbefittingly of your husband."

Elizabeth nodded. "Yes, so I do! But then I have promised my sister to stand by her in her hard fight between the filial

obedience she would so gladly show to you, and the aversion she feels for the Count."

"Aversion," muttered my father; "absurd!"

"And keeping my word, I say to her in your presence, Do not yield! You are my own sister; placed in circumstances similar to mine, your life would be as wretched as is mine," continued Elizabeth, still speaking with that terrible calmness.

While papa cried: "Wretched! what an extraordinary expression to use!"

And she: "Did I know one stronger, I would adopt it! Nothing is too strong to express the humiliation of knowing the being one looks up to—or rather one should look up to—to be a nonentity, or the hypocrisy of seeming to defer to him one knows to be one's inferior."

"Pride! pride!" sighed mamma. Her work had fallen on to her lap, she was white as death; and my heart felt how she was suffering as Elizabeth, merely acknowledging her interruption by a scornful curl of the lips, continued icily:

"The moral death it is, and how one despises oneself for it, but only with penitent humiliation to crawl again under the sacred yoke—that, of course, is understood. Who would make a public scandal of their matrimonial troubles—who seek escape from them—who attempt to drown themselves? Such, I have heard, is done by the vulgar horde who are without religion, or are the poor-spirited descendants of some worthy shoemaker or candlestick-maker, without courage or endurance. We, of the upper ten, are religious,

strong to endure, have the blood of heroes in our veins! We know no deserters from our posts! Therefore, Paula, weigh well before you undertake the post. It is a vilely loathsome one."

She turned to our parents:

"Dear father and mother, when you say to your child 'Accept So-and-so, he will give you a good position, splendid castles, a great establishment, well-appointed carriages, and the like,' you are doubtless doing what is right in your own eyes; but do not say to her, 'Do it because it will bring you happiness.' That you have no right to say. Believe me, it is presumptuous."

Only those who heard these words could form any idea of the effect, uttered as they were by Elizabeth, without raising her voice or accompanying them

by the slightest gesture. Low and deliberately they dropped like heart's blood from some deep wound; and as I hearkened to them, there arose in me the burning wish that there were anything on this earth, anything, however great and well-nigh impossible, that I might be privileged to do for my sister.

Mamma was petrified. Papa had sunk his arms upon his knees, and was looking down at his clenched fingers. His forehead was deeply furrowed, and for the first time the thought struck me how old he looked.

Bernhard broke the silence:

"My dear parents, I entreat you if things are thus—it would be my opinion—you understand what I mean——"

Oh, it was a blessing to us all, the warm-hearted manner in which he spoke!

Papa raising his head, thanked the dear fellow with an approving nod, then looking at mamma inquiringly: "What do you think?"

She, trying to answer, could not—could only sigh:

"Oh, God! oh, God!"

"What do you think, Caroline?" repeated papa. "Are you not also——"

"I do not know," said she, painfully. "It is very difficult."

"There is nothing difficult in it; it is all quite simple," broke in Bernhard. "You have only to tell the Count, our daughter is fully sensible of the honour, &c., &c., but she cannot yet make up her mind to marry; she does not want to leave us—and the thing is done!"

There ensued a long, painful silence. Papa brought it to an end, by saying:

"Yes. If she really does want to stay with us——"

And mamma put in hesitatingly: "Paula is certainly still very young!"

"Much too young!" cried I. This solution had never occurred to me. "Oh, my darling parents!" I would have rushed to them, but mamma made a sign to Elizabeth, and my sister, rising, went and stood before her.

"You have given us much pain to-day, Elizabeth," said papa. He held out his hand to her. She did not offer to kiss it. What must have been her feelings at that moment! Our dearest father had given her his hand in reconciliation, and Elizabeth had not kissed it.

At that moment the Count was announced; and with him my brother-in-law, to fetch his

wife for the usual drive. Both gentlemen seemed to be in a high state of annoyance at some blunder of their harness-maker; in each case their ideas had failed to be carried out.

Bernhard sympathised ironically in their grievances, but they took his malicious comments in sober earnest.

As Elizabeth and her husband left the room, running after them I threw my arms vehemently round my sister, and thanked her, caring nothing for the disapproving looks of my brother-in-law.

"What is all this frantic excitement about?" he asked.

Bernhard, who, too, following my example, had left the room, answered:

"Ah, my dear fellow! If you only knew the vagaries of this small person!" and he winked

at me. "Only think, this person refuses to have anything to say to Count Taxen. Count Taxen! the wittiest, noblest, and handsomest of men, and—she will have nothing to say to him!"

My brother-in-law, who evidently took it as a bad joke, answered: "Ah, well, it is a good thing that you are here to bring her to reason." He turned towards the door, Elizabeth with him. We looked after her, walking so calmly by his side—my poor, poor sister.

"I have often shuddered to think what must come to light if ever the secrets of that prison house were unfolded," said Bernhard.

"I, too, have often dreaded that she was unhappy," I replied, unable longer to restrain my tears. "My only wonder was that she never complained."

"No need to wonder at that!" he cried. "It is not suitable for general conversation. If circumstances force it from a true woman, she may speak of it once, but never again. Take example from her," and he affectionately patted my cheek. "Our friend in the drawing-room is getting his *congé*. Are you content, pussy?"

I was about to thank him for his goodness; but with an impatient movement he drew back, as he said:

"For heaven's sake, don't come the sentimental!"

My parents said no more to me about the Count; and it may be readily imagined that I never mentioned him to them. A few evenings before the *soirée* at which I made the resolve to write my Memoirs, his mother was present, and made a point of

showing me the greatest kindness. This noble-heartedness made me feel so small and ashamed, that I had to exercise the greatest self-control to prevent myself from earnestly praying the Countess to think kindly of me and forgive me. It would have been a fearful want of tact had I done so.

As she moved away, mischievous Pierre Coucy said, with a titter, "She is more la Crême to-night than ever—but sour."

"No wonder," rejoined his brother, with a side glance at me. Then to Elizabeth: "Have you heard our paragon son is off on a cruise—to Bohemia?"

"No, no," put in Pierre—"in an air balloon to recover his equilibrium."

I was confused at their sallies. But Elizabeth, with her majestic calm, said: "You are roman-

cing—now the secret is out! I have long suspected your silent proclivities."

"You are wrong, Countess! More than a writer of romance, I am a prophet!"

"Highly necessary!—in order to see through a sphynx like our friend Count Taxen."

So they went on cutting bad jests, until I felt quite sorry for the Count, who looked upon the Coucys as his friends. They must have imparted their surmise to others besides ourselves, for when Baron Schwarzburg came up to me that evening, I read it on his brow, and it laughed in his eyes, as he heartily wished the Count a pleasant journey.

Things are very strange at home now, and not altogether pleasant. Even my Duphot, for the first time in my life, bears a

grudge against me—in her gentle way, be it understood, and quite as much to her sorrow as to mine.

My beloved father is out-of-sorts, and although he often says, "Do whatever you like," the words over which I used to exult, now make me sad. I always dread lest I should hear in them, "Our wishes, of course, are of no account to you."

Mamma, too, seems depressed, and spends more time in church than ever.

She must be praying there for Elizabeth; for she has laid it upon me in my daily prayers to commend my poor sister to God, that He may turn her heart, and awaken in it a befitting and dutiful love to her husband. And I pray accordingly, though I must confess I doubt whether the Divine Power will see fit to be influenced in such a cause.

The true love which can arouse that burning devotion in us, akin only to sacred adoration, is given us by our Heavenly Father, if to be given at all, from the very beginning. The miserable supplementary love, gathered together for us by joint prayers, what can that avail?

May 25th.—Reading through these pages yesterday, I asked myself if these really are memoirs that I am writing? Memoirs treat of interesting people, and I am only writing about myself; they treat of interesting times, and I only occupy myself with the present, which, for the matter of that, is very interesting.

"A momentous period in the political world!" I heard an old gentleman say the other day.

My whole understanding for politics, however, is confined to a

decided interest in all that concerns the Governorship of our Province. Opportunities of discussing it, ever so welcome to me, are not wanting, papa having interests at stake in it. His object is to prevent the inhabitants of one of the districts, against better judgment, from cutting down the trees and tilling the land of one of the forests belonging to him. Until quite lately he was for ever complaining of the laxity of the local authorities. Suddenly, his invectives have ceased. I had long wanted to know why, but had not ventured to inquire into the subject on account of his not standing well with the authorities. At length to-day, taking courage, I said:

"How are things going about the district forest, papa? Is it going to be under tillage?"

"No, it is not."

"Then you have carried your point. That is capital."

"Father has carried his point, because he has put it, at last, into the hands of the right man," interposed Bernhard, continuing unabashed by papa's meaning look—"of the man of right, who this time has proved the truth of his axiom, Right must conquer."

Mamma and Madame Duphot in vain endeavoured to turn the subject; Bernhard, sticking to his point, would not yield, until he had forced from dear papa the acknowledgment that Baron Schwarzburg was a man of great talent, and a very fine fellow.

That afternoon it was settled that in a week we should leave town for Trostburg. Elizabeth was to come on a long visit to us and without her husband, who has just bought a new place in the

Marmaros, and is about to build a hunting castle there.

My sister is quite another person since her husband's departure; so much more animated, lively to audacity, and so loving and affectionate to papa and mamma.

She coaxes and pets me as if I were a baby.

"If only you had a real baby!" I said to her once.

"Silence!" she cried. "It is my one source of thankfulness that Heaven has not given me one! I should have hated it as I do——"

She did not finish her sentence; but I understood her too well, and felt a rush of deepest pity for her.

When I see her breathing thus freely again in her liberty, it always makes me think of a certain lovely mountain-ash tree

in the forest. A terrific storm beating over it had bowed down the young tree, until its crest had caught in the branches of a puny misshapen fir tree, much smaller than it, and the poor ash could not free itself. Its slender stem was bent like a bow; its tender branches, only accustomed to the free space of heaven above them wherein to stir and expand at their own sweet will, hung to earth withered and disconsolate, pining in the straggling clutches of the tyrant. Fortunately my father and I happened to pass that way. He had the worthless fir tree cut down; and oh, joy! the mountain-ash was freed: its elastic stem quickly righted itself, its branches swayed blissfully in the breeze, each individual leaflet uplifted itself with joyous flutter, and its graceful summit seemed to bow in greeting to its

companions, and to the blue sky above it, which, answering, shed the gladdening rays of sunlight full upon it.

The mountain-ash is for ever freed from its oppressor. My poor sister must return to her imprisonment when summer is over. But she does not allow this thought to trouble her happiness; she is too noble-spirited. She says, Enjoy your blessings while you have them; it is only the pampered children of fortune who do not give thanks for happiness, because it is fleeting. A Crœsus has no easy minute, for he has no security but that he may outlive his riches. The beggar does not enjoy the crust you give him any the less through fear of to-morrow's hunger.

The more I am with her, the more do I admire her and sor-

row for her; and the more I compare our lots, the more grateful am I for mine. How merciful God has been to me! The blessed freedom only granted for a brief space to my sister, is mine for ever to enjoy, and in addition to it the great, silent bliss of being privileged to think to my heart's content of him who is so unspeakably dear to me. Though separated from him, I will walk as if in his sight in all I do, or leave undone, asking myself, "Would he approve it?" he the right man, the man of right!

There must be something unusual in contemplation. There are mysterious conferences in the small drawing-room; long discussions in papa's study. Confusion reigns in every nook and corner. Mamma has sent round notes of excuse, and is

not holding her remaining receptions this season ; and Baron Schwarzburg, who seemed to have received no intimation of the change in her arrangements, was greatly astonished the other evening on finding us alone. I noticed papa and Bernhard exchange a hurried glance as he was announced, and that they looked with some concern at mamma. Her manner to him was cold, but not half as cold as that of my Duphot. She has conceived the most inexplicable antipathy to the Baron, and has confided to me more than once, with symptoms of extremest aversion, that she looks upon him as an *esprit fort*. He stayed an hour. The happiness I experienced in seeing and hearing him was sadly marred by thinking every instant, "Now he will take his leave, and I shall see and hear

him no more, perhaps, for years —perhaps, who knows? for ever! . . ."

It was an unspeakable surprise to me to hear papa say to him, as they shook hands: "You must look in again and see us before you leave." I could not help it—I rushed to papa and impulsively kissed his hand. Looking at me severely, he muttered:

"What is the matter? You seem to be growing foolish."

May 30th.—I must write down what has happened—if I can, if my trembling hand will let me, if my thoughts do not chase each other too swiftly. I have kept so calm all the evening, have been able to speak of the most indifferent things with such composure—why then should I feel so painfully agitated now?

I certainly did think that my family quietly overlooked the answers *à tort et à travers* I gave them at first. Could I have been mistaken? They all looked so wise, and the wildest imaginings were flying through my brain. But that was afterwards; what first took place was as follows:

This afternoon I was sitting alone in the great drawing-room, awaiting the return of mamma and Madame Duphot from church; when the door suddenly opened, and, without being announced, Baron Schwarzburg came in, saying:

"I come to say good-bye, Countess. I start to-morrow."

And I, in my bewilderment, could say nothing but:

"My mamma is not at home."

"I know," he replied.

"She will soon be back," I said. Upon which he bowed silently.

I had risen at his entry, and now did not know whether I might ask him to be seated. To leave him standing was too uncourteous. This threw me into a dilemma, and the first few delicious moments of our being alone together were truly uncomfortable.

He walked to the window, and for a while appeared to be absorbed in what was passing below. Then he turned again towards me. He was holding his hat in one hand, his gloves in the other, beating them on the brim of his hat.

For the sake of saying something, I remarked :

" The dust is blowing up very unpleasantly to-day."

The dearest smile played about his lips as he answered :

" Oh, no. It has been raining hard."

Another pause ensued, this time a long one; until the Baron brought it to a close by saying:

"You are aware that I am very glad to be going to Bosnia?"

I replied:

"Yes, I know—and I know the reason. You have a great work before you there."

"For the small scope of my office," he hastened to make reply. "It is just the inferiority of the office I hold which gives a certain importance to the work in hand. At any rate it must take a long time to settle; and I shall not think of coming home until it is completed."

"But you will have leave from time to time?"

"Yes, certainly."

"And you will come and see us?"

"Oh——of course."

"That will give pleasure to many—to me especially."

These very natural words of mine seemed to produce a remarkable impression upon him.

With warmth and agitation, he repeated:

"You especially?—you especially?"

He seemed about to add something, took a step towards me, then recalling himself, preserved silence, merely throwing his gloves impetuously into his hat, which he had placed upon the window-sill. Then I, regaining courage, said: "Do take a seat, Baron Schwarzburg."

He accepted my invitation, and we sat down on the two easy-chairs by the flower-table, facing each other, near the French window leading on to the balcony.

"How heavy and oppressive

the air is in town now!" he exclaimed.

And I agreed that it would be ever so much pleasanter in the country, and in Bosnia too.

"Oh—infinitely. And will you be as glad to go into the country, as I to go to Bosnia?"

I said yes. And then he wanted a description of my life at Trostburg, and I gave him a detailed account of the way I spent each day. He thanked me warmly. It would be so delightful to know where his thoughts could seek me at every hour of the day: in the woods, in the garden, in my own room, or in the library absorbed in some interesting book. "And be sure that my thoughts will often follow you," he added.

"I shall count upon that," was my reply.

"And will you be thinking of

me?" He looked into my eyes as he asked it.

With as firm a look, I answered:

"Always."

Then he seized my hand, and held it nervously, almost as though I were some priceless treasure.

"No, that you must not do! Even to one's best friend—and that I am to you—one does not give up all one's thoughts. He will consider himself happy indeed if you occasionally grant him a kindly remembrance."

This modest requirement disconcerted and displeased me, and I had the courage to tell him so. He must know perfectly well, I thought to myself, how very dear he is to me—and if I can make so bold as to assume that he likes me, he surely might be satisfied of my love for him. And

so I told him that, for my part, I should always have him in my thoughts, and that to do so would be my greatest happiness. My dear parents had now quite yielded to my wish that I should never marry. So that danger was over—once for all. I should go on living with them, loving and tending them as long as their dear lives lasted; and when I had them no longer on earth, would honour their memories, carry on their good works, and lead the life of an old maid, honoured, happy, and perhaps of some use in my generation.

He listened patiently, then responded:

"Very good. You have made me fully acquainted with it all: first, of your rules day by day; now your plans for the future. Very good, we will keep to it. You a willing and contented old

maid; I," he shrugged his shoulders, "of necessity, an old bachelor."

"Of necessity?"

"Yes!" he cried. "Where should I find a wife willing to share the hard life which I, at least temporarily, have to offer her?"

"Oh, on that account? A hard life is no obstacle!"

"And what is?"

"The wishes of one's parents."

"Ah, there we come back to the same thing. The parents' wishes spring from the feeling that the children they have brought up in luxury must not make a bad match; it would only lead to unhappiness and misery. It would lower them in their own eyes, and they would lose caste."

Waxing hotter and hotter as he went on, in his warmth he

said many things which were utterly illogical. He derided the prejudices of society, and yet constrained himself with painful self-mastery to declare that custom had sanctified these prejudices, and that they who belonged to the circles where they held good, did right to honour them.

"Then you do not act up to your conviction?" I said.

"I?—good heavens! Do not speak of what I do. I, as every one will tell you, am a fool. I am far from acting up to those convictions, because I do not, in truth, hold them; and on that account I am a very fool.... But not fool enough, Countess, not fool enough to persuade the one I love"—and here he pressed my hand with such force that I had the greatest difficulty to prevent an exclamation—"to

follow my example, and be my companion on my lonely way."

He clenched his teeth. His eyes looked wild; his accustomed self-control had quite forsaken him. He looked so fearfully agitated that he would have terrified me had I not loved him so well; but because I loved him so well I felt, oh, so sorry for him, and I said:

"I know somebody who would have no need of persuasion; who would only be too glad to go with you, if she dared!"

Instead of calming him, my words only seemed to excite him the more.

"Happy for that foolish girl that she does not dare! Happy for her. She little knows what she would be taking upon herself; little as I knew, nor the name that would be given me, and that I first heard myself

christened in scorn and derision, 'Idealist!' Be one! Struggle against the mighty element; waste your strength in useless warfare! . . . Wrench yourself free from all the fresh, joyous pursuits of your equals, your associates—once your brethren, now your adversaries, whose interests you oppose, whose convictions you belie, and—to whom you yet cling with every fibre of your heart!"

He was silent. And I did not venture to break the silence. Still ever louder, more distinct, there arose within me: foolish girl? Yes, twice foolish; to have thought it enough to follow him at a distance. With him is your place. All my other duties suddenly seemed to me unimportant in comparison. My dread of my beloved father, childish. . . . I believe that it was then

that in a very low, yet decided, voice, I said:

"Were it not better, in such a fight, to have a companion at one's side?"

"A companion?"

"One equally minded with oneself; but who, hitherto, has not so plainly stated her views, because she could not trust herself, did not so clearly see——"

I came to a standstill; I did not dare to look up at him. But I felt that his eyes were resting upon me as he asked gently, and with a ring of deep affection in his voice:

"Has it really only just become clear to her?"

"Yes, she knows that she, like you—is an idealist."

"Miracle of miracles!" he said, in oh, so playful a voice, and with such repressed rapture.

"Am I really to meet with so rare a being as an idealist in your circle? Nowadays! . . . Impossible!"

"Convince yourself."

"Shall I? Dare I? . . . Would the idealist you speak of be able to endure to cast in her lot with one so obscure, so unknown as I?"

"Of course. And I only wish, with all my heart, that you may remain obscure and unknown that I may the better prove to you——"

I got no further; for, rejoicing, he interrupted me:

"You! You! You then are willing to be that faithful, devoted companion? And to me is to be granted that rare fortune —highest of all earthly joys—to find in the wife of my soul the sharer of my views, the confidante of all, even my boldest

aims; my councillor in doubt, sweetest consoler in sorrow, closest sympathiser in success? You will be to me all that? All —despite everybody?"

"It will not need to be despite everybody," I made answer, confused by the passionate delight with which he pressed me to him. "I will entreat my dear father——"

"Your father!" he cried. And springing back, he struck his forehead like one possessed.

And I, to my great amazement, looking up, saw my father and Bernhard standing there.

"Well!" said papa, "Kept your word?"

"Do not ask me. Do not ask me!" cried Schwarzburg, beside himself.

With a loud laugh, Bernhard cried:

"What, have you not suc-

ceeded in persuading her against Baron Schwarzburg? I am jolly glad!"

"I am not," responded papa. "It is as I expected. But then, I am no idealist; I know mankind."

Bernhard blurted out, "If he had really been such a Don Quixote as to——"

"Be still!" said my father, authoritatively.

But he continued: "I would have cut him dead."

Here a footman announced that mamma awaited the gentlemen in the small drawing-room. They obeyed the summons at once; papa sending me up to my own room. Here I still am. They seem to have quite forgotten me; or else they will have no more to say to me. No one seems to trouble about me. . . . Oh, if I had not you, my

faithful Diary, in which to confide my every thought, I should indeed be greatly, greatly to be pitied.

EPILOGUE.

IF you have followed me thus far, kind readers, my thanks are due to you for your constancy. We must now bid farewell to each other. Not only have the Memoirs I so presumptuously undertook to write degenerated into a diary, but even that diary must now give place to a correspondence, the nature of which will for ever remain the secret of two individuals.

If you care to know how this came about, grant me your indulgence yet a little longer.

They left me an unconscion-

able time to myself that day. It had grown dark, and a death-like stillness reigned around. Even the most indefatigable songster among my birds had ceased singing, and, all crouched up, was asleep on his perch. How I envied the pretty little creature's peace of mind. . . .

At last I heard the sound of footsteps approaching my door, the tiny step of my Duphot.

"Ah, *ma chère!*" she said, mournful and reproachful, as she came in and bade me go with her to my parents. So wild a beating of the heart I do not suppose any one has ever experienced as that with which I obeyed her behest—it was too agonising, too dreadful.

Besides papa and mamma, I found my brother and sister and Baron Schwarzburg. He stood up as I came in; I, too, remained standing. Papa began:

"Paula, your mother and I, not desiring to incur a second time the reproach that the happiness of one of our children——"

"Or what she considers to be happiness," broke in mamma.

"Is of less importance to us," continued papa, "than it should be to parents who love their children, had therefore given our permission to Baron Schwarzburg to speak to you before he left. It has resulted——"

"Differently from what we anticipated," interpolated mamma.

"And as I hear, you are agreed in the idea——"

"Or in imagining," suggested mamma.

"That you are made for each other," said papa.

To which I said "Yes."

"Yes," repeated the Baron Schwarzburg, deeply moved.

"Well then, if two people are

really made for each other—a thing which very rarely happens —there is but one thing to be done. But it remains to be proved; and proof requires time. Endurance is the proof—so you must wait."

"We will wait," said Schwarzburg.

"Three years," said papa.

My head turned. I could not realise my happiness. So it was not, as I had with fear and trembling so fully expected to hear:

"Do it if you will. But give up all hope of our consent!"

"Only three years?" I asked.

"Not a day less," said mamma.

And I: "Why, that is nothing! We would wait *ten* years if you required it, dearest father and mother. We are happy beyond everything, and have no other wish than——"

"Speak for yourself!" put in Bernhard.

Baron Schwarzburg was looking decidedly alarmed, and I asked him: "Do you not think so? To wait—wait for each other—what could be more heavenly?"

"The shorter, the more heavenly," he returned.

Elizabeth, coming up to me, had taken me in her arms. "See, what a wise, sensible child it is! Three years' probation are too little for her; she prefers ten. Ah, she knows death is easy, but marriage is a venture!"

"Do not jest, Countess," interposed Schwarzburg. "I consent to three years—not a day less, but not a day more." His voice faltered, but a strong, unswerving determination gleamed in his eyes.

"So it is settled, and so it shall remain. A few hours ago,"

he continued, turning to me, "I had counted the happiness that has come to me as utterly unattainable: but now I have known it—it is mine, and I hold it fast, as fast as I am wont to hold the things most precious to me; and you are the most precious thing of all to me, Paula, and, I well know, the most sure." He took my hand, "In three years—but then—for life."

"From now—for life." I could say no more.

He took leave of us all. How sweet and natural Elizabeth was with him! . . . Oh, dear sister mine, can I ever thank you enough?

Only when the door had closed upon him, did the consciousness of our parting fall with leaden weight upon my heart. . . . He had gone, and we had scarce—nay, we had not, even said good-

bye to each other. An unspeakable sense of yearning came over me; I fought with the tears which choked me. No one said a word.

Suddenly Bernhard said laughingly: "Why, he has actually gone without his hat!"

All at once it flashed across me where it had been left; and I ran to the great drawing-room to fetch it. To the drawing-room they came, papa and the Baron—and how it happened I have not the least conception, but the next instant I was in the arms of my betrothed, pressed close to his heart, and he was showering kisses upon me—hot, passionate kisses.

Papa was standing by us—no longer the stern papa of the last few weeks, but the tender, loving one of old, and of all time to come.

I had only to look into his dear face to straightway regain my former boundless confidence in him; and in the strength of this confidence to say:

"May I write to him, papa?"

"And I to her?" asked Schwarzburg.

Papa hesitated.

"Why? what for? See . . ." he broke off—sighed—looked at us both with strong emotion; then with all the loving intonation of old came the dear, priceless formula:

"Well, do whatever you like."

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